

James – A Commentary

Eternal Values and Variables: Then and Now

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James

Introduction

No one would seriously maintain that on Sundays, during which church gatherings occur, all would unquestionably be Christians. Rather, it would surely be agreed that there would be a mixture of both Christians and non-Christians, despite the latter's potential claim to be one.

One of the most important, yet controversial, perspectives on James is the identification of its recipients. Schmidt (102) maintains that the disagreements among NT scholars as to whether this letter was written to Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians offer differing points of persuasion, but all of them "are contestable." However, even his position is "contestable."

With slight but significant modifications to the noted disagreements, Bassett (xli), for example, persuasively points out that this epistle would be read at the various church gatherings and "thus be heard by all, both Jewish non-Christians and Jewish Christians: the former were to appropriate the rebukes, the latter the consolations of the Epistle."

Essentially Jewish in Orientation

There are evidences within the letter itself which support the essential Jewish flavor of its recipients: (1) The differentiation between the poor and the rich, as in the OT, are scattered throughout the letter [1:10-11; 2:5-6; 5:1-3]; (2) The word translated "assembly" [2:2 – KJV] is the word *synagogen* which is transliterated "synagogue," thus, another Jewish flavored connection in regard to worship; (3) The reference to "one God" [2:19] reflects the Jewish confession of faith [Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21]; (4) Church members or attendees cursing one another, and the common Jewish addictions to pride, fraud, confusion, strife, and evil works [3:9-16]; (5) Charges of wars, lusts, envy, enmity/enemy of God [4:1-5] do not reflect or characterize converted Christians; (6) The notes of pleasure, wantonness, condemnation of Christ [5:5-6] are discordant with the Christian faith; (7) The prohibition of oaths are typically Jewish [5:12]. So, here we have a Jew writing to Jews; and with similar objectives with which Paul himself wrote throughout his letters.

This Jewish orientation is the position adopted in this commentary. This perspective accounts for all the conflicting existence of both rebukes and warnings (to Jewish non-Christians) and consolations and praise (for Jewish Christians). This position affords consistency not only within the letter itself but also with the Bible as a whole.

In the commentary section of verse-by-verse analysis, two items which are indispensable to correct understanding of the purpose of this letter will be detailed in v. 1: (1) "the twelve tribes" and (2) "that are in the diaspora."

It is also germane in this regard to note the numerous parallels between this letter and the Gospel According to Matthew, perhaps the most Jewish of the four gospel accounts. After all, Matthew seeks to show that Jesus is the true fulfillment of the OT and of Judaism in ways that the other three do not. He quotes from the OT with Messianic emphases. He uses the kingdom of "heaven" instead of the kingdom of "God" for circumlocution purposes. Plus, for what its worth, Matthew is "the most severely hostile toward Jewish leaders and Jewish legalism" (Kee, 56).

Additionally, James presents to his readers the teachings of a Christianity with a pre-

dominately Jewish background. There are four terms which identify James with a Jewish background: (1) “Abraham” [2:21, 23]; (2) “Lord of Sabaoth” [5:4]; (3) Mosaic law [2:8-9 = Lev. 19:18; Dt. 1:17; 2:11 = Ex. 20:13-14; Dt. 5:18]; (4) anointing with oil [5:14 – “the use of oil as a medicine was widespread in the ancient world” (Easton, 70)].

New Testament Parallels

While he is not singing a solo in this regard, Alford (105-106) in footnote 8 draws attention to the parallels or connection between this letter and the Sermon on the Mount:

<u>James</u>	<u>Matthew</u>
1:2	5:10-12
1:4	5:48
1:5, 15	7:7 ff.
1:9	5:3
1:20	5:22
2:13	6:14, 15
2:14 ff.	7:21 ff.
3:17, 18	5:9
4:4	6:24
4:10	5:3, 4
4:11	7:1 ff.
5:2	6:19
5:10	5:12
5:12	5:33 ff.

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A Commentary

I TWELVE TRIBES (1:1)

1:1: “James a servant of God and of [the] Lord Jesus Christ to the twelve tribes that are in the dispersion – Greeting”

- A. This is James, the son of Zebedee, brother of John, who together with Peter “were in the first class of the Apostolic College” (Bassett, xi). Despite the obvious struggles which they experienced and expressed behaviorally, they, like James, were, nevertheless, servants “of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”
The word “servant” (*doulos*) denotes a faithful devotee to his service to God and Jesus and “that, and that alone, gave him a right to speak and a claim to be heard” (Gibson, 1).
- B. “the twelve tribes” - The disappearance of the Northern Kingdom or Israel or Samaria occurred in 722 B.C. when conquered by the Assyrians. The Southern Kingdom/Judah and Benjamin would be greatly reduced in the Babylonian Captivity in 586 B.C. Those who decided not to return to Jerusalem became known as the dispersed ones. They intermingled with those who were not Jews in marriage and other ways.
Some, however, understand the reference here to be to “the tribes as the new people of God in which OT expectations have come to fulfillment. Since this new people also lives far from its heavenly home and hence in the *diaspora*, it is still on the march to the final consummation in spite of all the promises already fulfilled” (Maurer, 250).
- C. “that are in the diaspora” – This could refer to the Jews who had been scattered beyond Jerusalem and Judea after the Babylonian Captivity in 586 B.C. and had adopted the Greek language, customs, and manners. This resulted in a mixture of Jews who practiced the worship of God and those who did not. Some in the diaspora had accepted Jesus as the Messiah and some had not.
Since worship took place in synagogues, rather than the Temple in Jerusalem, “their synagogue was still open to all Jews” (Gibson, viii), some, if not many of whom were not Christians. “The word *dispersion* is therefore specified to be the Jews who were scattered up and down the Gentile world” (Bassett, xl).
Those Jews who did not return to Jerusalem were referred to as “a distinct section of the Hebrew race” (Bassett, xxxix). They had chosen to live among the Gentiles and thus lost their religious identity. They were known as Grecians (*Hellenistes* – “Hellenists” [Acts 6:1; 9:29; 11:20]). The word itself is similar to “Greeks” - *Hellen* [Jn. 7:35; 12:20; Acts 14:1; 16:1, 3; 17:4; 18:4, 17; 19:10, 17; 20:21; 21:28; Rom. 1:14, 16; 2:9, 10; 3:9; 10:12; 1 Cor. 1:22, 23, 24; 10:32; 12:13; Gal. 2:3; 3:28; Col. 3:11]).
- D. The word “greeting” (*chairein*) means “rejoice, be glad; how do you do? hello” (BAG, 882). Moffat (7-8) suggests that this “courteous” greeting

of joyfulness *to* his readers expects to be “echoed by *charan* (‘joy’)” *from* his readers.

II TROUBLES (1:2-12)

A. Troubles Are Many (1:2)

1. Attitude: “My fellow Christians, count it all joy”

The word *adelphoi* (“brethren” [KJV]) refers to “fellow Christians,” as translated here, lest the “brethren” term seems to imply restriction to the male gender. It refers to both Jewish and Gentile Christians. “This usage is to be deemed a natural outgrowth of the Jewish usage. . . . It is a form appropriate to a member of a strictly defined society, such as the Jewish or Christian brotherhood” (Ropes, 132). In fact, Moulton and Milligan (9) also state it may “denote members of the same religious community.” Deissmann (87) likewise.

However, in order to cover even those Jews who were not Christians, the term may be more broadly understood in reference to non-Christian Jews – which exact expression Paul used in Rom. 9:3: “my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” This word occurs elsewhere in this letter: 1:9, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14, 15; 3:1, 10, 12; 4: 11 [3 times]; 5:7, 9, 10, 12, 19.

The verb translated “count” (*hegesasthe*) is a first aorist imperative which means to act now and in a once-for-all manner. It means “to consider, think about, regard” with a sensible, logical manner which is couched in the compartment of joyfulness. After all, ultimately there is more to life than all the material and physical phenomena which paints each day with various flavors.

After all, James does not say that “trial *is* all joy; he bids us *count* it joy, that is, look at it from the bright side, as capable of being turned to our highest good” (Mayor, 33).

This attitude of “joy” (*charan*) is to be comprehensive: “all” (*pasan*) – that is, entire, unmixed, complete, whole kind of joy”; “supreme, full joy” (Vaughan, 18). This is not some superficial, superfluous suggestion which denies, ignores, belittles, or seeks to snuff out the realities of sorrows, griefs, pains, and other rattling kinds of difficulties which life pitches into and along our pathways.

Rather, the word calls for filtering “all” these difficulties through the lens of a special, spiritually-oriented kind of joy which provides the ultimate relief so that

the beneficial effects of each trouble, steadfastly en-

dured, more than compensate for the immediate pain it inflicts. Under the gospel, trials change character; they are an exercise of fortitude, a rich contribution to experience, a test of the consolations of the Spirit, a call to trust in God, and to pity and pardon toward men, and a preparation for heaven. Thus each trial becomes to the Christian mind the discipline of a Father's hand, and an occasion for joy and thanksgiving; it ceases to be affliction; it is all joy. Winkler, 15.

Even though James does not here reference Paul's experience, the allusion to Paul's triumphant adoption of this attitude of joy is surely appropriately documented by Paul himself in 2 Cor. 11:24-28.

2. Anticipation: "when you fall into"

The reality of these difficulties, trials, troubles, and challenges should be anticipated. In fact, it is just part of the package which life offers and unfolds. The word "when" (*hotan*) before the verb "fall" (*peripesete*) depicts "becoming unexpectedly surrounded by adverse circumstances of any kind" (Alford, 275), or "unwelcome encounters" (Ropes, 134) or "unanticipated experience" (Nystrom, 47).

Mayor (34) notes that this word "brings out the externality of the temptation in opposition to the internal temptation arising from *idia epithumia* (ver. 14.)"

3. Alternatives: "divers"

The word translated "divers" (*poikilois*) means "various kinds of, all sorts of, varied, diverse, multiple flavors." BAG (690) adds "*diversified, manifold, many-colored, variegated.*" It occurs here only in this letter but elsewhere in the NT: Mt. 4:24; Mk. 1:34; Lk. 4:40; 2 Tim. 3:6; Tit. 3:3; Heb. 2:4, 13:9; 1 Pt. 1:6; 4:10.

4. Antagonism: "temptations"

The word translated "temptations" (*peirasmois*) depicts "*an experiment, attempt, trial, proving; the trial of man's fidelity, integrity, virtue, constancy*" (Thayer, 498). Vincent (724) "in general sense of trials."

Alford (275) stresses that the word involves "not only what

we properly call *temptations*, but any kind of distresses which happen to us, from without or from within, which in God's purpose serves as *trials* of us."

Robertson's (11) words may be jolting: "'Trials' is clearly the meaning here, but the evil sense appears in verse 12. Trials rightly faced are harmless, but wrongly met become temptations to evil."

B. Troubles Can Be Meaningful (1:3-4)

1. Design: "Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience/endurance" (v. 3)

The word "knowing" (*ginoskontes*) indicates a "recognizing" (Oesterley, 421) of the fact that the design of these troubles is to have a positive and meaningful impact on one's faith. This is "not necessarily a new piece of knowledge, but new apprehension of it" (Hort, 5).

The word translated "testing" (*dokimion*) means "*a test, way or means of proving*" (Liddell and Scott, 364); it denotes what is "*genuine, without alloy*" (BAG, 202); what is "*to be found approved*" (Cremer, 494).

This verification-oriented outcome of "the trying of faith not only indicates the testing of its quality, but also the happy results of that test" (Winkler, 15): "it produces patience" (*katergazetai hupomonen*). The word "patience" does not refer to merely passive endurance but "the *brave* patience with which the Christian contends against various hindrances, persecutions and temptations that befall him in his conflict with the outward and inward world" (Trench, 197). As Ross (27) observes, it is that "endurance [or] *staying power* which enables a man to persevere steadfastly through the most adverse circumstances."

This divine design has a positive, progressive point of being which is advanced in v. 4: development.

2. Development: "and endurance must have its finished work that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing" (v. 4)

This developmental variable which characterizes endurance is no mere vague, imaginary end product; it is measured by fulfilling a concrete purpose: "perfect" (*teleioi*) and "entire" (*holokleroi*).

The word translated "perfect" means "having attained the full limits of stature, strength, and mental power within their reach. . . . one who has attained his moral *end*, that

for which he was intended, namely to be a man in Christ.
. . . no grace is merely in its weak imperfect beginnings,
but all have reached a certain ripeness and maturity (Trench,
75, 77).

The word translated “entire” means “one who has preserved,
or who, having once lost, has now regained, his *completeness*”
. . . no grace which ought to be in a Christian man is deficient
(Trench, 77). This word occurs only one other time in the NT:
1 Thess. 5:23..

Taken together, as the heads and tails of the same coin, the
primary thrust of these terms means that the one who endures
the troubles comes out as “complete in all its parts . . . a mature
and ripened character” (Ross, 28).

As Brown (17) observes: “Do you never sigh and long for a
full-developed character? Are we so far gone in seeking gain
and ease and pleasure that we have no deep passionate longing
to be like Christ, to grow up into Him in all things? It has never
been accomplished without trial, and never will be.”

C Troubles Can Be Mastered (1:5-8)

Some of the readers, however, were lacking in the type wisdom which
enables them to master, rather than be mastered by, their troubles.

1. How to handle them: “Now if anyone of you is lacking in wis-
dom, he must keep on asking of God Who keeps on giving to all
generously even without denouncing and it shall be given to him”
(v. 5)

Moffatt (11) states that wisdom here denotes that

life which interpreted the divine law as the rule
for faith and morals; moral and spiritual require-
ments rather than on ritual or dogmatic considera-
tions . . . an absorbing interest in human relation-
ships and responsibilities, actuated by humble re-
verence for God’s law . . . divine endowment of the
soul by which man recognizes and realises that di-
vine rule of life called righteousness in the manage-
ment of [one’s] own conduct.

This type wisdom is the kind which is needed so that troubles
may be mastered or dealt with constructively rather than de-
structively. And the remarkable reality is that God Himself is
the One Who keeps on giving this type wisdom to all who
keep on asking.

The adverb “generously” (*haplos*) occurs here only in the NT. Mayor (39) translates “simply, unconditionally, without bargaining; in a moral sense, generously.” Ropes (140) prefers “graciously, bounteously, generously.” Hort suggests, “graciously (7), “the absence of guile and duplicity; truthfulness, liberality, gentleness” (8). The added words, “even without denouncing” (*kai me oneidizontos*) indicates that God’s attitude toward the asker is clear: “He does not upbraid or reproach the recipient as being utterly unworthy of the boon bestowed on him” (Ross, 29). Moffatt (11-12) adds, “God never so taunts our prayers . . . He bestows on us what we need without raising embarrassing questions about our deserts, and without a hard word, never harping on the benefit or treating prayer as presumption . . . no grudging or reluctance on His part.” God’s delivery is guaranteed!

2. Expect God to answer: “But he must keep on asking in faith without wavering” (v. 6a)

This constant “asking” for the type of wisdom that is required to effectively handle the troubles of life hinges on “faith” (*pistei*). Since “the great need of the believer is wisdom to understand all God’s purposes in placing us amid these continuous trials” (Lenski, 529) then “faith” in and commitment to Him must characterize these ongoing prayerful requests.

In other words, these prayerful requests must not only spring from “faith” but also with the expectation that God’s promise to deliver will be forthcoming. After all, God “is ready to add new blessings to former ones without any end or limitation” (Tasker, 42).

The words “without wavering” (*meden diakrinomenos*) means that “we are not to oscillate between faith and unbelief, trust and distrust, pleading as it were with boldness, but all the time thinking that it is really useless to ask” (Vaughan, 24). The word means to “*be at odds with oneself*” (BAG, 184). For one’s asking to be effective, he/she must not be “fickle in his practical allegiance” (Moffatt, 12).

3. Comparison: “for the one who wavers is like a wave of the sea, being wind-driven and tossed up, down, and around” (v. 6b)

The verb word “wavering” sends up images of a wild and restless sea or ocean where waves are being driven by the wind in one direction and then another, “changing from one moment to another – a wonderfully apt symbol of a mind that cannot

fix itself in belief” (Oesterley, 423). Indeed, in comparison to waves in the water, the doubter “has no stability, no peace or constancy, fluctuating here and there, now swelling with hope, now sinking into despondency, as fortune changes” (Winkler, 17-18).

Smith (50) puts this stunning reality in place:

There are any number of people who complain bitterly of their woes, but are not sincere in their wish to have them removed, and still less sincere in wishing to find that they have a reason and a use. They hug their grievances, are proud of their misery, and find a perverted pleasure – nay, a distinction – in fancying themselves the victims of injustice. Their prayers for wisdom would be unreal, for they would not wish them answered. For them, complaint is a luxury which they will never relinquish. They could not be satisfied, for they know not what they want.

4. Catastrophe: “For that man must not think that he shall receive anything from the Lord” (v. 7) – “a double-minded man [is] unstable in all his ways” (v. 8)

Such a wavering-oriented person comes to a catastrophic conclusion: there will be no answer from the Lord. His lack of endurance, his instability, his fluctuating changes of mind, aim, and direction block or bar the door to the Divine Storehouse. He actually dishonours God because he actually has no confidence, trust, or assurance in His Word; he treats the Divine Storehouse and Supervisor as unworthy of serious and persistent pursuits.

The word “double-minded” (*dipsuchos*) occurs only one other place in the NT, and actually in this letter: 4:8. Adam (29) points out some interesting particulars about this word:

The double-minded man has a divided spirit, he is driven in two opposite directions – now heavenward, then earthward. The meaning is not that he is hypocritical, deceitful; that he *is* one thing, and *pretends* to be another. He is distracted, fluctuating, vacillating, inclined to good and evil by turns – with his feelings moved, but his principles unfixed – with a sense of what is right, but a love of what is wrong; having a selfish desire to serve God, but a still stronger reluctance to abandon mammon.

This instability exists not only in the realm of religion but also in all facets of life: flip-flopping from one side to another, from going forward to going backward; a confused and confusing mix of what is and what is not important; a spirit of contamination which disrupts every department of life. After all, in every form of sadness which one can muster, such a person is utterly “fickle” (Moulton and Milligan, 166).

Again, such a one is “not *deceitful*, but *dubious* and *undecided*” (Vincent, 727). The word “unstable” (*akatastatos*) occurs here and 3:8 in the NT. It portrays such a person as one who is “unsteady, staggering, reeling like a drunken man” (Robertson, 15). Such a person is intellectually challenged both mentally and spiritually, bereft of sensibility, illogical to the max, and resembles “a restless demon” (BAG, 29).

D Troubles May Involve Money (1:9-11)

1. The lack of money is common to many: “The brother of lowly circumstances must rejoice in his high position” (v. 9)

The word translated “lowly circumstances” (*tapeinos*) also occurs in 4:6. It was first used by Jesus in describing Himself in Mt. 11:29. It occurs elsewhere in the NT: Lk. 1:52; Rom. 12:16; 2 Cor. 7:6; 10:1; 1 Pt. 5:5. It depicts those “having little of this world’s substance, those in a needy, afflicted temporal condition” (Adam 33).

Nevertheless, instead of pitying them, or having them pity themselves, James directs their attention to the “high position” (*to hupsei*). That is, the position they have “obtained by being admitted into the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings” (Alford, 278). It denotes that despite those deprivations, there is “true joy which lifts his spirits above material limitations and he has learned to count important the spiritual values [of those who belong] to Christ” (Harper, 1990). There is joy every morning at the realization of their spiritual riches. It also indicates that those of lowly circumstances “find the elevation he so much craves in the moral gain achieved through trials” (Ropes, 145).

2. The rich who trust in riches rather than God: “And the rich one in his humiliation” (v. 10a)

The rich, on the other hand, refers to “the unrighteous” (Songer, 109) and they find themselves in a position of false security: trusting in riches instead of God. They are “prosperous and in high standing” (Bengel, 697) in their own eyes but not in the

eyes of God.

The word “humiliation” (*tapeimos*) denotes that his riches are actually or “really his degradation . . . he glories in what is really lowering” (Gibson, 3), after all is said and done.

The rich may glory or boast in their resources and possessions but the brevity of life and the glories of earthly possessions are a dead end street. They do not have any value beyond the surface of this planet. This should precipitate humility since true wealth or riches cannot be transported into the next life. “The pomp of their condition is like the bloom of a wild plant, which fades away as soon as it displays its glory” (Vaughan, 26).

3. Comparison: “because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun arose with a scorching heat and withered the grass and its flower fell off and the beauty of its appearance was destroyed; so also the rich one in his pursuits shall wither away” (v. 10b-11)

The comparison of flowering grass to those with riches and a disregard of God yields shocking, inevitable, results or ends. Indeed, “the oppressed Christian should keep in mind the reversal of his fortune that judgment will bring, and he can glory in this” (Songer, 109).

These reversals of states “are tragical only in the case of the wealthy unbeliever, who, in losing his wealth, loses everything (Ps. 49:5-20; Lk. 12:16-21; 16:19-26)” (Winkler, 21).

“The rich man’s travels will come to ‘journey’s end’” (Robertson, 16).

So, it is best to understand this section of scripture “in the light of the final judgment” (Songer, 109), or as Blackman (51) designates it, “largely eschatological.”

E Troubles May Be Measured (1:12)

1. Internal Blessedness: “Blessed [is] the man”

“Both in form and substance this verse is characteristically Jewish and Biblical” (Ropes, 150). It is this assurance of blessedness which encourages his readers that they will supercede life’s troubles when handle in God’s prescribed manner. Indeed, the word “blessed” (*makarios*) speaks of an inner quality of happiness which comes from God – not affected by outward situations.

2. Superior Life: “who endures troubles”

The word “endures” (*hupomenei*) means that determination and persistence and “steadfastness to which reference has been made in verses two and three . . . without which the Christian character cannot reach perfection, and that a divine wisdom is available for the believer in answer to prayer at every stage in the life of holiness” (Tasker, 44).

The word “troubles” (*peirasmon*) first occurred in v. 6 and appears nowhere else in this letter. It “refers to those various troubles and calamities, permitted by God for the purpose of testing the faith, piety, and virtue of his people” (Winkler, 21). The one who “endures” is the one who “survives and conquers” (Brown, 23).

Again, this word refers to outward trials and not some inward temptation to evil. As Ropes notes, “inner enticement to evil would have to be *resisted*, not *endured*” (150).

When troubles are handled from God’s perspective, they produce the superior life.

3. Passing the Exam: “for when he is tested”

The word “tested” (*dokimos*) first appeared in v. 3, and means “approval, genuine, respected, valued, stand the test.” This is the case for the one who has been “steadfast under affliction” (Tasker, 45).

In connection with the first part of this verse, “the one who *endures trial* clearly *has stood the test*, and endurance is the mark of *those who love him*” (Songer, 110).

That is, after or “when he *has been approved by trial*” (Vincent, 728); when he has withstood the testing by enduring trouble.

4. Endlessness: “He shall receive the crown of the life”

The word “crown” (*stephanon*) refers to “the *royal* crown” (Vincent, 728). Indeed, due to the Jewishness of James, it is likely that this crown is “that of sovereignty or royalty” (Ross, 32). It is the “mark of honour to be given by the Great King to his friends” (Ropes, 152).

The article “the” before “life” indicates that “the well-known eternal life” (Vincent, 728) is in view. It is the crown which consists of life “in all its range and fullness” (Ross, 32).

As Smith (56) observes, James speaks as “no Stoic, counseling endurance as the way to peace, and detachment from one’s surroundings as a way to self-perfection. He speaks with an accent of triumph.”

III TRACKS OF TEMPTATION (1:13-16)

Now, Paul transitions from “trials” for the perfecting of Christians to the “temptations” to sin which Christians face always and in many ways. He also switches terms to so indicate: from the noun *peirasmos* (vs. 2, 12) to the verb *peirazomenos* (vs. 13 [three times], 14 [one time]). Some say the tracks of temptation to do evil may be regarded as another form or manifestation of “trials.” However, if we regard the tracks of temptation or the inclination to evil in the same proportion as “trials” noted above, then “we make God the Author of the moral evil [in these verses], in other words a tempter” (Hort, 22). So, extreme care and caution must be exercised here.

A. The Certainty of Temptation (1:13)

1. Not “if” but “when” – “In no way when one is being tempted”

The present tense verb “when one is being tempted” indicates in the moment *as* temptation is under way or is occurring. It is a certainty that temptation is part of the package of life. It is not a rarity but a reality. So, one should not live under the cloud that temptation may or may not transpire.

2. To verb translated “tempted” (*peirazomenos*) means “to allure or entice to danger.” It is the “inducement to do evil” (Smith, 57), or the solicitation or enticement to sin.

B. The Cause of Temptation (1:13-14)

1. Some blame God – “must he say, ‘I am being tempted from God’ for God is not temptable by evil, and He Himself is not tempting anyone” (v. 13)

The word “from” (*apo*) rather than “by” (*hupo* or *en*) is most important: it emphasizes the source or origin of being tempted to evil, which is not “from God.” If this is misunderstood, it makes God the agent or cause of sin. This, of course, runs counter to the entire biblical revelation from God and about God.

The noun “not temptable” (*apeirastos*) occurs here only in the NT and denotest that God is “unable to be tempted.” Alford (280) notes that God is “unversed in things evil . . . has never experienced adversity,” and, therefore, cannot tempt anyone to evil. Mayor (53) elucidates: “God is incapable of tempting others to evil, because He is Himself absolutely insusceptible to evil; *i.e.*, our belief in God’s own character, in His perfect purity and holiness, makes it impossible for us to suppose that it is from Him that our temptations proceed.”

2. God says it is within us: “But each one is being tempted when he is being carried away and is being enticed by his own lust” (v. 14)

God, on the other hand, instructs us that temptations to evil are not from the devil, heredity, or sources other than “by our own lust” (*hupo tes idias epithumias*). This refers to our desires which are not in concert with God’s desires.

This time the word *hupo* is used to indicate the agency through which temptation works.

The verb “is being carried away” (*exelkomenos*) occurs here only in the NT. It means “to draw or lure away.”

The verb “is being enticed” (*deleazomenos*) occurs elsewhere in the NT: 2 Pt. 2:14, 18. It is used to depict the catching of fish “by bait” (Robertson, 18). Thus, temptation’s allurements is designed to catch our “lust, desire” off guard and to engulf or swallow one in defeat by yielding to it.

C The Consequences of Temptation (1:15-16)

When we do not resist temptation, its consequences are certain and severe.

“Then the lust, having conceived, produces sin, and the sin, having become complete, brings forth death” (v. 15)

It is so true: “Sin follows the seduction as naturally as birth follows conception” (Winkler, 23).

The verb “having become complete” (*apotelestheisa*) occurs here only in the NT. Sin is brought into a state of completion when there is no repentance.

The word “brings forth” (*apokueo*) will occur again in v. 18. Here it brings forth “death.” As Lenski (543) notes, “sin is pregnant with death because of its very nature.”

“Stop being deceived, my beloved fellow Christians” (v. 16)

If this prohibitive imperative verb “stop being deceived” (*planasthe*) is in the middle voice, it means to “stop deceiving yourselves” by blaming God – or others – about the tracks of temptation and sin.

This is the first appearance of the word “beloved” (*agapatos*) in this letter; it will occur again in v. 19, and 2:5. It is a term of special affection and/or endearment, highlighting those who are the objects of God’s love and of the love of James.

IV THANKFULNESS (1:17-18)

- A. God Never Changes in Regard to His Philanthropy: “Every good

gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation or the casting of a dark shadow”

Philanthropy means “helpfulness to humanity.” God is the source of good in this world. His philanthropy is seen in His bestowal of blessings or gifts which are here specified:

1. “Every good gift” (*pasa dosis agathe*) embraces God being “lavish in his generosity” (Smith, 62) which likely refers to “the gradual instilling of wisdom” (Mayor, 58) as noted above.
2. “every perfect gift” (*pan dorema teleion*) embraces “the value of the gift received” (Smith, 62) which likely refers to “the final crown of life” (Mayor, 58) as noted above.

B. God Never Changes in Regard to His Personhood (1:17)

1. God’s character is that He is “the Father of lights” which refers to His creative nature in the physical universe: sun, moon, stars. But it also embraces His “spiritual illumination and blessings” (Harper, 202).
2. Variation occurs, however, among created heavenly bodies in regard to the brightness of their visibility and purpose but not the Creator of those heavenly bodies. He never changes in regard to His Personhood or character or essence. He does not possess an ounce of “fickleness and frailty” (Ropes, 164). There is no variation with Him as there is with those heavenly bodies.
In His dealings with His own, “there is never the slightest variation or shadow of inconsistency” (Phillips). That is, God is sufficient within Himself and there is never a shadow which He casts upon His own. There is no need for such a shadow. He never darkens the doorway into His presence. God does not create a dark shadow by turning away from His own.

C. God Never Changes in Regard to His Power (1:18)

1. His saving/regenerative power is clear: “of His own will He begot us” – That is, He Himself brought about the spiritual birth from above. Such is the nature and purpose of His being Father.
2. This took/takes place “by the word of truth.” As James will accent in vs. 21, 22, 23, as sons and “doers of the Word” they are such because they have embraced the knowledge of God’s truth and will.

D. God Never Changes in Regard to His Purpose (1:18)

1. Consecration: “we to be first-fruits among His creatures” –

The expression “the first-fruits among His creatures” (*aparchen tina ton autou ktismaton*) is from the OT to depict consecration to God which His faithful ones display. They are “the chief and noblest part” (Bengel, 700) of His creatures. They are “a sample of what God wills” (Brown, 31) for others – “the first sheaves from the great harvest-field of the world” (Ibid, 32).

2. Cooperation: Those who have been born from above, having faith in God, and are characterized by appropriate responses to troubles and temptations, are, indeed, consecrated to him and are living in full co-operation with His will and purposes.

V TRUE RELIGION (1:19-27)

The term “religious” (*threskos*) occurs here only (v. 26) in the NT. Its offshoot “religion” (*threskeia*) occurs in vs. 26 and 27; also in Acts 16:5 and Col. 2:18. Together, these two terms denote religion “in its external aspect of worship” (Hatch, 57). Robertson (24) adds, “such as church attendance, almsgiving, prayer, fasting (Matt. 6:1-18).”

This section of scripture depicts how true religion, *of the Christian variety*, looks in practical ramifications or applications in behaviors. Instead of being a new section with different themes or modes, it is, instead, a further development of what James has been writing about since v. 1. It is another way of putting forth the truths of God (v. 18) about true religion from other angles or perspectives. It is all about consecration and cooperation fleshed out in more concrete conduct. These truths about this true religion are separated into three camps: Actions (1:19-21) – Analogy (1:22-25) – Admonitions (1:26-27)

As a semi-preface to these camps, James uses the perfect tense imperative: “Know” (*Iste = oida*) means to jar his readers into conscious awareness that all he has written about their new status as saints of God, and what he is presently writing, must be reflected in their personal and corporate conduct (Tasker, 50). Now, “act upon your knowledge” (Mayor, 64). In other words, James “will tell them what to do with this knowledge” (Lenski, 549). Again, he couples this semi-preface with the reminder that he is writing to them as those whom he regards with loving affection and concern: “my beloved fellow Christians” (*adelphoi mou agapetoι* – cp. v.16), and the desired responses:

A. Actions (1:19-21)

1. Swift to Hear: “Let everyone be swift to hear” (*pas anthropos tachus eis to akousia*) (v. 19)

As Harper (204) so wisely reminds us, “He who listens most intently best understands his fellowman.” There is always the need for “a good listener” (Bowman, 103). This is especially important when it comes to hearing the word of truth. Indeed, “the divine word is specially re-

ferred to; a ready reception of it and a cordial submission may well be indicated as the first duty of disciples” (Winkler, 27).

Manton (133) remarks: “If we were as patient and swift to hear as we are ready to speak, there would be less of wrath and more of profit in our meetings.”

2. Slow to Speak: “slow to speak” (1:19)

This requires one to be “thoughtful and deliberate” (Bowman, 103).

After all, “the love of violent and disputatious speech was to be a special object of attack in the Epistle (c. iii)” (Hort, 35).

Indeed, “ceaseless talkers may easily degenerate into fierce controversialists, and may indulge in wild denunciations of those who oppose them, denunciations in which they may sometimes fancy they are doing God’s service, but which really do more harm than good” (Ross, 38).

3. Slow to Wrath/Anger: “slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteous requirements of God” (1:19-20)

The word “wrath/anger” (*orgen*) refers to “more of an abiding and settled habit of mind with the purpose of revenge” (Trench, 131).

However, since “man, unlike God, never knows all the circumstances of the case” (Oesterley, 431), this reality creates the need for restraint. In other words, be “not over-hasty, given to jumping to conclusions” (Bowman, 103). By connecting this component with the previous one, “he probably means that slowness to speak up when angry will tend to curb the anger” (Robertson, 21).

After all, man’s anger may be a combination of genetic factors, environmental triggers, biases, prejudices, misunderstandings, and other complex variables which may need reorientation and adjustments to its causes and manifestations.

God’s righteous requirements cannot be carried out in the life of one dominated by poor listening skills to His Word and others, hasty and irresponsible speaking, and angry zeal which is devoid of humility. How many such misadventures have “ended only in disgracing ourselves, and Him whom we would have served before men” (Alford, 285). So, what steps can be taken to avoid such disgrace? James offers a precise strategy which must be implemented in this regard.

4. Strategy to Implement: “Therefore, having put aside all filthiness and all the left overs of hateful feelings of evil, in the sphere or atmosphere of gentleness and humility, you must receive the rooted word which is able to save your souls” (1:21)

In order to implement a positive strategy which reflects the righteous

requirements of God, it must be “combined with the willingness to go into [a more positive] action when the wrong is shown to be one’s own: put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness” (Bowman, 103). Plus, this must be done “in the sphere or atmosphere of gentleness and humility.” The word “gentleness and humility” (*prauteti*) denotes “without arrogance, impatience, or anger; does not resent injustice; readiness to be taught by the Word of God; the lack of bitter zeal; teachableness.” It “does not fight against God, and more or less struggle with Him” (Trench, 152).

With another twist, this humility is “submissiveness to God and at the same time gentle consideration for one’s fellow men . . . a religious attitude of receptivity towards God which manifests itself in the presence of men” (Moffatt, 25).

Davidson (52) offers additional light:

This humility is not merely a temperament, or a social or ethical condition of mind; it is a religious attitude; it is the broad general sense of what a man is in the presence of God . . . patience of temper, in thoughtful consideration of men, or on matters of importance, in slowness to speak, and even in a dignified manner of utterance, in opposition to the levity and want of consideration and the unthinking haste of the fool; and in general in a cautious and discreet course of conduct.

This strategy for true religion requires the reception of the rooted word or “the word of truth” (v. 18), and cannot take place without it. To use the figure of the seed and the soil, the word is “engrafted or **which roots itself inwardly**, that being the property of the divine revelation” (Moffatt, 25), it “is able to save your souls.”

As Robertson (95) notes: “It brings a present salvation here and now (John 5:34), a new life of purity. It helps in the progressive salvation of the whole man in his battle with sin and growth in grace (2 Tim. 3:15). It leads to final salvation in heaven with God in God (1 Pet. 1:9). The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), the very power of God pulses in it.”

B. Analogy (1:22-25)

By way of analogical comparison to a mirror, the necessity of letting

this word of truth accomplish its objective is accordingly framed. It may either be treated superficially or with utmost singleheartedness.

1. Superficial: “You yourselves must constantly be putting the message of the word into action and not merely being passive, superficial hearers only, thereby leading oneself astray” (1:22)

The Christian must ever be putting the word of truth into actual, practical application along the pathways of life’s terrain, despite the troubles, or as the way to counter and offset the troubles. The Christian must never be content to be a mere passive hearer which is actually “a form of self-deception” (Tasker, 52).

“For if someone is merely a passive, superficial hearer and not one who puts the word into action, this one is like a man looking at the face of his birth in a mirror” (1:23)

The words of truth which are merely heard by someone but not allowed to penetrate beyond the surface of their being, and actually forgotten, may be compared to a man who glazes at himself in a mirror.

“For after he looked at his face and went away, he even immediately forgot what he looked like” (1:24)

Ross (40) states that “here in James we have the more familiar idea of a man seeing his natural face, literally, the face of his birth, the face he brought into the world with him, in a mirror. The mirror of the Word of God reveals man to himself; it shows him that there is something wrong with the nature which he brought into the world with him.”

Since the Word of God does not present a flattering, optimistic reflection of our human nature, it is no wonder that people do not “gaze too long or too often in it” (Ibid.).

Indeed, “he takes a quick look at a mirror and goes away, forgetful of the kind of man he is (the point being, he should have done something about it!)” (Bowman, 103).

The perfect tense of the word “went away” (*epelatheto*) indicates “the permanence of the result. This man ‘goes away and does not return’ (Harper, 206). Moule (12) translates, “*No sooner has he looked . . . than he has gone away and . . . forgotten.*” Oesterley (434) takes a modified stance. The word “face” (*prosopon*) “is here used in the sense of ‘personality at birth,’

before he had become sin-stained; thus being what he was originally meant to be.”

2. Singlehearted: “But the one who gazes intently at the perfect law of freedom and practices it, not having been a superficial hearer of forgetfulness but an active practitioner [of truth], this one [is] blessed in what he shall do” (1:25)

The word translated “gazes intently” (*parakupsas*) carries “the idea of eagerness and concentration” (Oesterley, 434), unlike the one who merely ‘glances’ at the word.

“The perfect law of freedom/liberty” is “the gospel, as containing the rule of Christian life – the truth which as received into the heart makes the believer free (John 8:32) from the bondage of ceremonies (Acts 15:10), and from the despotism of the passions” (Winkler, 30). In fact, in a dramatic and dynamic manner, the transformative nature of the gospel radically alters one’s essential being in to a “new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17, imparting new motives and “an unconstrained and joyful obedience to God” (Ibid.). James is here harkening back to “the word of truth” (1:18).

In contrast to the superficial response to the word of truth, the Christian’s singlehearted response is that, as a result of “seeing himself in its light, he should not forget what he is like but be ‘a doer that acts’” (Bowman, 103). By taking what is heard, the Christian translates and adopts “its implications for practical living” (Tasker, 53).

The word “blessed” (*makarios*) was first used in v. 12. Here it denotes that “this one” and only “this one” is blessed. “The thought is that the blessing comes not simply after the deed is accomplished but in the course of performing it. The act of obedience carries in itself a blessing” (Vaughan, 41).

C. Admonitions (1:26-27)

This obedience is now given admonitions toward practical applications.

1. Speech: “If someone seems to be religious while not controlling his tongue but deceiving his heart, this one’s religion is worthless” (1:26)

This reference to speech was introduced in v. 19, and will be expanded in 3:1-18.

The term “religious” (*threskos*) occurs here only (v. 26) in the NT. Its offshoot “religion” (*threskeia*) occurs in vs. 26 and 27; also in Acts 16:5 and Col. 2:18. James uses both terms “to set in contrast that which is unreal and deceptive, and ‘the pure religion’ which consists in visiting” (Vine, 954) the needy.

Together, these two terms denote religion “in its external aspect of worship” (Hatch, 57). Robertson (24) adds, “such as church attendance, almsgiving, prayer, fasting (Matt. 6:1-18).”

Rituals without reality is a form of self-induced deception and is “vain or empty [and] comes to nothing” (Robertson, 25) before God, others, and even those engaged in performing the rituals.

2. Service: “Pure and undefiled religion in the presence of God even [the] Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their troubles” (1:27)

What really matters to God, others, and genuine Christians is service.

In illustrating the nature and objective of true religion, the mention of “orphans and widows” is no new item of concern. Deut. 27:19; Ps. 68:5, and Isa. 1:17, for example, reveal that this has always been a concern of God. This gives “some solid content in terms of social and personal ethics” (Bowman, 104) to true religion.

The addition of “Father” in this verse indicates that “to think of Him as Father was to think of men as brethren involved in the visiting of orphans and widows” (Hort, 44). After all, such are “the natural objects of charity in the community” (Ropes, 184). That is, “to comfort the mourners in their affliction” (Edersheim, 172).

Those who are concerned with the demonstration of true religion in action embrace this “right spirit of religion which leads to such acts” (Robertson, 25).

3. Spotlessness: “and to keep oneself spotless from the world’s slime” (1:27)

The word translated “spotless” (*aspilon*) occurs here only in James but elsewhere in the NT: 1 Tim. 6:14; 1 Pt. 1:19; 2 Pt. 3:14. It is used “figuratively in a moral sense” (BAG, 116). Oepke (502) also affirms its reference is to being “morally pure . . . new religious and moral content to originally cultic concepts.” Thayer (81): “*free from vice, unsullied.*”

The word “world” refers to “the ‘order’ or sphere of human life separated from God because it no longer is an expression of His will” (Harper, 207).

By engaging in these types of service, the Christian will keep himself disentangled from the world's slut and slime of selfish aim, drives, motives, purposes, and pursuits.

VI TWISTED TREATMENT (2:1-13)

- A. An Evil Pronounced: "My fellow Christians, all of you must stop insisting on possessing your faith in our Lord Jesus Christ [who is] the glorious [presence of God on this planet] in connection with practicing concrete acts of partiality or favoritism [of one person over another]" (2:1)

James, again (1:16, 19), uses the affectionate term *adelphoi* ("fellow Christians, brothers") in speaking to the heart of his dear readers.

This is especially important in light of the confrontations which are frequently presented in this letter.

He then, in light of the favoritism and partialities in motion in this church, directs them to stop displaying such discordant, distracting, and debilitating acts which were inconsistent with faith in Jesus Christ. After all, He is One Who "glory" is on the line. The word "glory" (*doxes*) indicates "a manifestation of the presence of God" (Laws, 97), and their practices of partiality or favoritism of one person over another were on a collision course with this manifestation. In fact, it was a twisted treatment, an evil which he here pronounces. He then, portrays an example of this evil.

- B. An Example Portrayed (2:2-7)

1. Rich man/Poor man

"For if a man may enter into your assembly wearing a gold ring in splendid clothing, and a poor man may also enter in shabby clothing" (2:2)

The words "For if" may be translated "for example," or "to illustrate" (Nystrom, 115) in reference to some concrete event in the gathering together of the congregation. In order to drive home his point about partiality, James portrays before his readers a specific example with which they were most familiar – and of which they were most guilty. His point about partiality would be less effective if he had simply created a mere hypothetical possibility which could have created wiggle room on their part. The word translated "assembly" (*sunagogen*- a Jewish) is transliterated in English: "synagogue." Even though this is the

only occurrence of this word in the letter, and in 5:14 James uses the word “church” (*ekklesias*) only once also, these two terms are apparently used synonymously to denote the “place of worship” (Adamson, 105).

Both a rich man and a poor man enter the same assembly. What will the reaction of the church be to these two drastically differing men in terms of their clothing, apparel, and appearance?

So, the contrast creates a conflict of choices: “It makes no sense to show favoritism based solely on factors that on other occasions are used to exploit Christians” (Nystrom, 116) – but such was apparently the case at hand.

“And you may heap acts of partiality or favoritism upon the one wearing the splendid clothing and may say, ‘You must sit here in this place of honor,’ and you may say to the poor man, ‘You must stand there or you must keep on sitting down under my feet’ (2:3)

The contrast between the rich man and poor man is based solely on outward appearance. The two were being evaluated “by something external and not by their real character” (Ross, 47). They were likely “visitors” or “outsiders, whether Jews or Gentiles” (Ropes, 191), neither of whom were likely Christians - which made the matter even worse!

Perhaps the rich man walked in with head held high, glancing around to see how *appreciated* he was in the eyes of his beholders. The rich man is showered with welcome and tokens of honor and praise by others, in addition to the honor and praise in which he held himself, as seen in the wearing of a gold ring and ostentatious clothing.

He was likely oblivious to the fact that his beholders were well aware that it was “wealth and status that grants to non-Christians the ability to oppress the church” (Nystrom, 116), but that could easily have slidden down the slopes of all their minds in light of the dazzling dressy parade his performance provided.

The poor man, on the other hand, was likely “used to being rejected, [so] he slinks in the door only to feel those assembled draw back from him as he expected; the trashy state of his clothes declares him to be human trash, of no value in worldly terms” (Davids, 57).

[One of the early Church Constitutions from Ethiopia “consisting of a body of ecclesiastical law, and of directions and instruction for Christian life” adapts this passage with amazing similarity, and is found in Horner’s *Statutes of the Apostles*, 195-196.]

“Have you not made inappropriate distinctions among yourselves

and become judges with wicked ways of thinking?” (2:4)

The word “inappropriate distinctions” (*diekrithete*) means “to divide, doubt, debate, dispute, take issue” “among yourselves” without consideration of the “faith” which they claimed to possess. It involves “to be divided in one’s mind, to hesitate; to be at variance with oneself” (Vine, 845, 329).

After all, the Christian faith excludes such distinctions about people based on external variables. In fact, it is a departure from the faith, a denial of the faith, and indicates they have “fallen under the condemnation pronounced in 1:6-8 against the *dipsuchos* [“double-minded”]” (Ropes, 192).

James classifies such thinking as “wicked” (*poneron*) in a most “active” (Lenski, 566) sense. This word will occur again in 4:16. Taylor (152-153) describes it as follows: “aptness to do shrewd turns, to delight in mischiefs and tragedies; a loving to trouble our neighbour and to do him ill offices; crossness, perverseness, and peevishness of action in our intercourse.”

Trench (315-316) classifies it as “that which is morally evil contemplated on various sides and from various points of view . . . nuisible, noxious, or noisome . . . not content unless he is corrupting others as well, and drawing them into the same destruction with himself.”

“Listen, my beloved fellow Christians, did not God choose the poor of the world [to be] rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (2:5)

The word “listen” (*akousate*) is an imperative which demands immediate attention and action. Although couched in the form of a question, it is a question which commands the answer: *yes*. The word “choose” (*exelexati*) triggers the “election terminology of Israel (Dt. 4:37; 7:7) and the church (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pt. 2:9) but he applies it to the poor” (Davids, 58).

The word “poor” (*ptochous*) reflects their relation to earthly goods and material possessions, privileges, and power. But their richness was reflected in their “faith and [being] heirs of the kingdom or reign of God.

The word “heirs” (*kleronomous*) denotes those who are “the recipients of God’s promises and of those who wait for what is promised” (Foerster, 781). Indeed, those “to whom something has been assigned by God, on possession of which, however, he has not yet entered” (Vine, 552).

Mayor (86) states that “in the NT the word is commonly used in connection with the blessing which belongs to divine sonship. It is synonymous with the new birth, eternal life, and salvation.”

The word “kingdom” (*basileias*) occurs here only in James and refers to the kingly rule of God, and that of “the highest dignity” (Bengel, 704). “The essential meaning is reign rather than realm . . . which comes down by divine intervention” (Schmidt, 582).

“But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are oppressing you and themselves who are dragging you into court?” (2:6)

In alarming opposition to God, this church has dishonored the poor by basically belittling them and showing partiality to the rich man; what Ropes (195) calls, “by your truckling to the rich.” The word “dishonored” (*etimasate*) means to “treat shamefully, degrade, humiliate.” The church had “slighted him by putting him into an inferior position” (Mayor, 87). As Davids (59) deposits, “the church that shames the poor in any way (1 Cor. 11:22) has stepped outside of God’s will and no longer acts on behalf of God.”

It is the rich who were guilty of “their notorious oppressions, even using violence towards the Christian poor” (Winkler, 35). If the poor, for example, could not make a payment on a loan, “the rich dragged them into court to foreclose or brought charges of libel against those who complained, or perhaps they even accused the Christians of disturbing the peace and order of the community” (Davids, 59).

The word “dragged” (*helkousin*) is used here, as in Acts 16:19 and 21:30, “of dragging with force and violence” (Ross, 47; cp. Vincent, 740). Vine (338) confirms: “of forcibly drawing men to or from a place.”

“Are they themselves not blaspheming the beautiful name by which you have been called?” (2:7)

So, in the most unChristlike manner, the church was cooperating with the rich in their treatment of the poor. The church had become guilty of oppressing the poor in the same way in which the rich had been oppressing the church. What a conundrum! Instead of “blessing” the beautiful name of the One Who had called them, they were “blaspheming” that name by acting against Him and them. The word “blaspheming” (*blasphemousin*) is actually a transliteration of the Greek word but its meaning is translated “speaking against God, speaking insulting or slanderous words.” It refers to “injurious speech, especially irreverent allusion to God and sacred things” (Ropes, 196). Vine (133) notes “rail at or revile of any contumelious speech, calumniating, railing at etc., as of those who railed at Christ.”

2. All of this raises doubts about their possession of faith, let alone their profession of faith.

C An Exception Permitted (2:8)

1. An objection based on the law which they are actually breaking: “However, if you are carrying out the royal law in accordance with the scripture, ‘**You shall love your neighbor as yourself,**’ you are doing well” (2:8)

The word translated “royal” (*basilikon*) means “belonging to a king” (Vine, 988); it occurs elsewhere in the NT: John 4:46, 49; Acts 12:20, 21.

Their treatment of the poor man was a clear and solid violation of this permitted exception. That is, instead of loving him and treating him with selfless care and concern, they were not “doing well” at all: a despicable violation of Lev. 19:18.

2. Practicing partiality to the wealthy and neglecting the needs of the poor man – their neighbor – said more about them than it did about him; it was totally out of character with the God Who Himself may have been the One Who sent him into their presence. This violation of the law in regard to loving relationships was a *Sword of Damocles* – a disaster without excuse.

D. An Exclusion Prohibited (2:9-11)

1. Practicing partiality to the wealthy is sin because this is not what the law commands: “But if you are practicing partiality, you are practicing sin and are being convicted by the law as lawbreakers” (2:9)

This disaster was so severe that James classifies it as “sin” (*hamartian*). Trench (240, 241) defines it as, “a failing and missing the true end and scope of our lives, which is God. . . . sin in the abstract as well as the concrete; or again, the act of sinning no less than the sin which is actually sinned. . . . sin contemplated in its separate outcomings and deeds of disobedience to a divine law.”

The reference to law is that found in Lev. 19:15 which immediately precedes the ‘royal law’ just mentioned in v. 8. The word “lawbreakers” (*parabatai*) here and in v. 11 indicate “one who stands beside, then, one who oversteps the prescribed limit” (Vine, 1173). The word occurs only three other times in the NT: Rom. 2:25, 27; Gal. 2:18.

“For whoever may keep the whole law and may fail in one part, stands guilty of all” (2:10)

The law as recorded in Lev. 19 was given for the purpose of keeping *all* of the commandments. “As in cases involving capital punishment one offence is fatal, so under the government of God the knowing and persistent violation of one precept suffices to condemn, making the observance of all other duties nugatory. When a servant of the Lord does only what he chooses, he follows, not the will of the Master, but his own” (Winkler, 37).

Ross (48) notes that “the Law of God is a unified whole and disregard of one commandment means that you are disobedient to the Lawgiver. So, do not entertain the delusion that the keeping of one isolated commandment of the Decalogue will compensate for the breach of some other of its requirements.”

“For the One having said, **You must not commit adultery**, also said, **You must not commit murder**. Now if you are committing adultery but not committing murder, you stand a lawbreaker of law” (2:11)

After all, whether one or all, the principle of obedience or disobedience to God is on the line.

James here almost, if not altogether, creates a sneak-attack context from which there is no escape. Although they may not be guilty of murder or adultery, all would surely agree that both are violations of God’s intended will. So, in keeping with the principle of whole and parts, his readers are caught in the same web. Their respecting of one person over another, showing favoritism to one and frowning upon another, is just as much a violation of the law as seen in the Leviticus citations.

Huther (111-112) frames it this way: “By this general sentence James seeks to confirm the thought that respect of persons includes the transgression of the whole law, although it appears to be directed against a single commandment.”

E. An Emphasis Prescribed (2:12-13)

1. One’s speech and actions reveal one’s moral state: “So speak and behave as those going to be judged by law of freedom/liberty” (2:12)

The verbs “speak” and “behave” are present tense imperatives which call for habitual actions in both these regards. For example, 1:19-21 are contrasted with 1:22-25, as well as 1:26

with 1:27.

This “law of freedom/liberty” is the “royal law” (2:8) which prioritizes “love” as its motive, manner, and movements in relation to others. This “law” is “violated by partiality” (Robertson, 31); “it abhors slavery, and therefore also the respecting of persons” (Bengel, 705).

2. *The law of liberty* frees us from sin to obey God: “For the judgment without mercy [is] to those not having practiced mercy; [yet] mercy triumphs over judgment [for those who have practiced mercy]” (2:13)

The judgment of God will be commensurate with or in proper proportion with how our treatment of others transpired. While Christians are free from the bondage of the “petty details of the old law” of Moses (Harper, 213), they are not free from the law of love which operates in the sphere of treating others with equal respect and mercifulness. As Mayor (87) notes, “if there has been in you the true spirit of love to God and love to man, that is accepted as the real fulfillment of the law” of love.

The sternness of this judgment of God, will be in conjunction with one’s treatment of others. This judgment is applied strictly and specifically to the case of the readers’ merciless treatment of the poor man. They turned from the royal law, the law of freedom, the law of love, as if it did not exist. Their judgmental cruelty to the poor man will trigger reciprocal judgmental cruelty from God. Their lack of mercy to the poor man will be met by the lack of mercy from God. After all, “mercy is not for those that only honour rich men, but them that are full of bowels and bounty to the poor . . . They were so far from giving due respect, that they were guilty of undue disrespect; a practice which certainly will leave [one] ashamed at the day of judgment, to our own just horrors and discouragements” (Manton, 225).

The truth which “stands out with startling solemnity is that, in the day when men are judged, he that has had no mercy on his fellowmen will have no mercy from God” (Brown, 53). This, of course, echoes the words of Jesus about merciful forgiveness (Mt. 6:14). Brown continues, “and for the man who has shown no mercy, no compassion, and who, therefore, has lived in absolute antagonism to the divine law, there will be a terrible awakening in the life to come.”

The positive side of judgment is also here pitched. Mercy shown to others, like the poor, on this earth, will have heavenly ripple effects. This “sentence no doubt means that the mercy shown by the merciful, as in contrast to him who shows no mercy, enables him to stand in the judgment which otherwise would over-

whelm him; so mercy is full of glad confidence and knows no fear in view of the hour of judgment” (Knowling, 52).

The obvious point, when contextually viewed, is the opposing treatments by the readers of the rich man and the poor man.

This is the first and primary meaning being presented by James. However, this “linking of mercy with the commandment to love one’s neighbor is in the earliest Christian tradition in the parable of the merciful Samaritan (cf. Luke 10:25-37)” (Songer, 116). It still holds true today!

VII TAKING ACTION (2:14-26)

Having just made the contrast between mercy and judgment, James now draws the contrast between faith with works and faith without works. In verses 14-17, “he offers an example of a response to a sister or brother in need in order to argue that true faith is proven by a willingness to step forward and offer concrete assistance” (Nystrom, 147).

A. Profitable (2:14-17)

1. It profits the one who has it only if it leads to taking action: “What good is it, my fellow Christians, if he may keep on claiming to have faith but may not keep on having works? Is that faith being able to save him?” (2:14)

True faith is profitable to the person who has it because it manifests it self in active works for others; it is able to save him. However, the faith which does not issue into active works for others is not the kind of faith which saves. So, it is this “spurious claim to faith that James here condemns” (Robertson, 34), but with the recognition that the saving claim to faith is profitable to the one who has it because of its output. However, without this output, it is a mere profession that is profitless, lacking any benefit.

The word translated “good” (*ophelos*) occurs also in v. 16; its only other occurrence in the NT is 1 Cor. 15:32.

Again, in this context, James is primarily thinking of the neglect of the poor man, a neglect which reveals the absence of saving faith. It has been stated that “God placed the poor on earth in order to save rich men from Hell; the idea, of course, being that opportunities for doing [good] were thus provided” (Oesterley, 444).

This is a strategically placed, semi-sarcastic question which obviously expects the answer, “no.” A faith of this kind or sort is not able to save him or anyone else. James now hangs a noose around the necks of anyone who exhibits this kind of faith.

2. It is profitable to others only if it leads to action: “If a brother or sister be in need of clothes and daily food” (2:15)

The word translated “in need of clothes” (*gumnoi*) may mean “naked; uncovered; bare; poorly dressed, in need of clothes.” Vine (781) remarks: “clad in the undergarment only (the outer being laid aside.”

The words “daily food” (*tes ephemerou trophes*) are used “to describe the poor person’s need as urgent” (Ropers, 206), or “that which is for a day” (Robertson, 34). The word “daily” occurs here only in the NT.

Instead of a hypothetical case, in all likelihood it refers to their treatment of the poor man noted above. So, “James’s impatience with an impractical faith comes through sharply” (Harper, 216).

“and one of you may say to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm and eat your fill,’ and you may not give them things needful for the body, what good is it?” (2:16)

The mere spattering of the noted words imply their disposition to “let somebody else warm and feed you! What do you think of a faith that produces such evidence” (Lenski, 579). These mere words are dead “so far from applying a practical remedy in a desperate situation, their only effect would be to depress still further those who were already chilled and starving” (Tasker, 64).

The mere possession and profession of such worthlessness words will profit the needy poor man just as much “as much as your professed faith, without those works which are the genuine fruits of true faith, will profit you in the day when God comes to sit in judgment upon your soul” (Clark, 811).

“Even so also the faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself” (2:17)

This superfluous sort of faith is “inwardly dead as well as outwardly inoperative” (Ross, 51). If it was a saving sort of faith, its active works would manifest itself accordingly. Since it is “**alone** – it has no accompanying deeds” (Harper, 216).

“The refusal to take this step [toward meeting an obvious need] rendered their sympathy and prayer profitless” (Songer, 118). The kind of faith “that has no power to bring one to obedience and to sway the life is as worthless as good wishes which end in words” (Johnson, 344).

B. Proveable (2:18-26)

1. A fruitless faith is unproveable because there are no results: “But some one may say, ‘You have faith and I have works’; show me your faith without the works, and I shall show you my faith out of my works” (2:18)

James puts forth an objector by the word “but” (*All*) as if to say that faith and works may exist separately. So, he objects to the anticipated objector when he stands “flatly and comprehensively to deny that faith and works are separate” (Ropes, 209).

It is not as complicated as one might imagine: “without works faith cannot be proved to exist at all; for without works, it has no expression” (Winkler, 40). Or, as Johnson (344) frames it: “the life lived is the proof of the faith held. If a man lives in obedience to Christ that is proof that he has faith in Christ.”

2. Mere intellectual belief is demonic: “You believe that there is one God, you do well; the demons also believe and they are trembling with fear” (2:19)

The “belief” that there is “one God” is a somewhat commendable position and reflects a rather common proclamation that is universal by nature itself. But it, as ‘belief without behavior’ or ‘faith without works’ is insufficient for the kind of belief or faith which saves.

In fact, even demons have this kind of belief or fruitless faith which only “leaves them in their damned state, and every act of it only increases their torment. . . . they believe and tremble but they can neither love nor obey” (Clark, 812).

The word “trembling with fear” (*phrissousin*) is a present tense verb which denotes their ongoing reaction “of horror which [from a human standpoint] makes the hair stand on end and contrasts the surface of the skin, making ‘goose-flesh” (Vincent, 744). Exactly how this ongoing reaction manifests itself among the demons must create a *shuddering* which is beyond human comprehension and adequate description.

3. One’s lifestyle or conduct provides the needed evidence: “But are you willing to recognize, O foolish fellow, that faith without works is dead?” (2:20)

The question James raises is one which is based on simple recognition of obvious truth. Being logical, sensible, and rational can lead to no other conclusion.

The forcefulness of James's stance is seen in the word "O" which is always used in the NT for emphasis. His forcefulness is further reenforced by the designation "foolish fellow" (*anthrope kene* – or "empty" – "a metaphor taken from an empty vessel [Manton, 243]) which accurately describes but is also designed to jar one out of such *senselessness, empty-headedness and cold-heartedness* into seeing the necessity of being filled with "the word of truth" (1:18) and "receive the implanted Word" (1:21) "so that he might know what true faith is, so that no 'someone' could come and persuade him to be satisfied with a faith that is no better than that of demons" (Lenski, 586). So, by having pointed his objector-reader/s to demons as the most dreadful example of those who merely believe facts but are devoid of that true faith which is accompanied by and manifested in works of compassion on the poor and needy, James hopes to jar them out of delusion and into dedication and devotion to the true faith and its saving power. His efforts to bring about sufficient jarring into reality is now illustrated with Abraham and Rahab.

- a. Abraham: "Was not our father Abraham declared righteous by works when he offered up on the altar his son?" (2:21)

James is pointing to the offering of his son which Abraham made as proof of his faith or "his willingness to surrender Isaac to God" (Ross, 53).

"You see that faith was working with his works and his faith had been brought to fruition out of his works" (2:22)

The word translated "brought to fruition" (*eteleiothe*) is also translated "made perfect" (KJV), "perfected" (NAS), "made complete" (Williams), "reached its goal" (Beck).

Ropes (220) observes, "If, when the test came, the faith had not been matched by works, then it would have been proved to be an incomplete faith. The works showed that the faith had always been of the right kind, and so 'completed' it."

Abraham's faith was no mere intellectual acknowledgment of factual information but an active demonstration of commitment to God, regardless of the consequences. His faith led to fruition and the fruition legitimated his faith.

“And the scripture was fulfilled in saying, ‘**Abraham exercised faith in God, and [his faith] had been put into his account for righteousness** and he was called a friend of God” (2:23)

The fulfillment of this truth is located in Gen. 15:6, and is also echoed by Paul in Romans 4:3, 9, 22; Gal. 3:6. Its primary meaning is that Abraham exercised “self-denying obedience” (Alford, 301) – the true sign of true faith.

While used here in a positive sense, the term “friend” is used in a negative sense in 4:4.

“You see that a man is declared righteous out of his works and not by means of faith alone” (2:24)

The word “declared righteous” (*dikaioutai*) is also translated “justified” (KJV), “shown to be upright” (Williams), “gets to be righteous” (Beck).

Indeed, “we are justified by faith alone, but not by the faith which is alone” (Ross, 55).

- b. Rahab: “And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also declared righteous by means of works when she received the messengers and sent them out a different way?” (2:25)

Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute, is mentioned in Joshua 2:1-21; 6:17, 22-25, for her missionary work of protecting the messengers of God because of her faith in Him; in the genealogy of Jesus (Mt. 1:5), and extolled as an example of faith (Heb. 11:31).

- c. Conclusion: “For just as the body without spirit is dead, so also the faith without works is dead” (2:26)

When, in death, the spirit is separated from the body, there is no argumentation about life still existing in that body. Even so, when faith is separated from works, there is no argumentation that “spiritual death and corruption” (Ross, 56) are still on the throne; “so lifeless is faith unless it shows an energy in works” (Johnson, 345).

VIII THE TONGUE (3:1-12)

The epistle of James, in some form, deals with the subject of speech in every chapter (20 out of 108 verses deal with speaking). But chapter three, perhaps, covers more ground on the subject than all other references combined. This section of scripture deals with the threefold role of the tongue in the formation of words and speaking.

A. The Tongue is Powerful (3:1-5)

1. Speech is used in “teaching” and should not be entered into without maturity: “Many of you must stop becoming teachers, my fellow Christians, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (v. 1)

“The office of teacher was in such honor among the Jews that many, however ill qualified for its discharge, were eager to assume it” (Winkler, 44). The gift of teaching is, indeed, one of the gifts of the Spirit. “Teachers are necessary, but incompetent and unworthy ones do much harm” (Robertson, 39), thus the imperative: “Many of you must stop becoming teachers.”

Indeed, in light of the circulation of much false teachings taking place, this imperative “would not have been said unless there had been grave danger [of his readers] being influenced by the doctrines condemned” (Oesterley, 450). As the custom was, it would not be best to allow any teachers to enter their meetings and expound ideas which likely were counter to the Christian faith.

Let he be reprimanded for an arrogant attitude in this regard, however, he inserts his affectionate expression, “my fellow Christians.”

Among other things, this prohibition was significant because teachers must teach truthful knowledge that is in sink with scripture. There must be no pretence of knowledge which winds up being false and misleading – and sinful. “Indeed, the sin of the teacher is more glaring, creates a greater scandal, and is visited with severer punishment” (Bassett, 47). The teachers use of the tongue is loaded with responsibility, and may lead to greater condemnation when that responsibility is not accurately and adequately demonstrated.

“For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in speaking, this one [is] a mature man able to control the whole body” (3:2)

This verse begins with an axiomatic or self-evident statement. The word “stumble” (*ptaiomen*) means “‘to slip,’ ‘to err,’ ‘to sin’” (Schmidt, 883). But the one who does not stumble when it comes to teaching is, indeed, a “mature man.” This indicates that the teacher is qualified by having accurate information, an effective teaching format and objectives, and is “fully pleasing to God” (Harper, 221).

This mature man “does not stumble in speech and is able also to control his whole body with all its passions” (Robertson, 40).

3. Examples: In verses 3-5, James uses three vivid figures to point out and illustrate the power of the tongue:

- a. “bits in horses’ mouth” – “Now if we place the bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we direct their whole body also” (3:3)

By means of the relatively small bits in a horse’s mouth, the rider is able to subdue the horse and control its whole body. Even so, the tongue is a relatively small member of the human body, yet it exerts a powerful influence over human beings. The word “direct” (*metagomen*) means “to guide, to change the direction” (Robertson, 40); it occurs only here and v. 4 in the NT.

- b. “rudder of ship” – “Behold also the ships, although they are so large and are being driven by strong winds, it is still being turned by a small rudder wherever the pilot wishes” (3:4)

Now, James uses the figure of a relatively small rudder which directs large ships. Even in the midst of a storm, the ship is guided by a small rudder. Likewise, the tongue is powerful in the storms of life. “What we say in the midst of our problems determines whether we will have victory or not. If we doubt God and despair during our trials, they will destroy us. But if we use our tongues to claim God’s provisions and promises for our lives, we will have victory” (Draper, 101).

Can the deeds of the tongue be exaggerated? The tongue, for example, “can either sway us to violence, or can move us to noblest actions. It can instruct the uninformed, encourage the dejected, comfort the sorrowing, and soothe the dying. Or, it can crush the human spirit, destroy reputations, spread distrust and hate, and bring nations to the brink of war” (Vaughan, 69).

The word translated “wishes” (*bouletai*) denotes that the rudder is, nevertheless, under the control of the pilot.

c. “small spark to start great fire” – “So also the tongue is a small member and boasts of great things. Behold how large a forest is set ablaze by a small spark” (3:5)

The third figure continues illustrating the small spark and the large forest fire which sets it ablaze. Likewise, the tongue may be puny in size but it is powerful in strength.

“James here speaks of its boasting great things, rather than of its working great things, because the effects of its power are commonly deplorable, as he immediately proceeds to show” (Winkler, 46).

B. The Tongue Can Be Poisonous (3:6-8)

It was the third illustration which afforded James the opportunity to discuss the poisonous nature of the tongue.

1. Its iniquity abounds: “And the tongue is a fire, the world of iniquity” (3:6a)

The tongue, James says, is like a fire that is out of control. It is “the world of iniquity” in that it is “a complete repertory of all wickedness, as the world is of all things” (Alford, 305). That is, “it can stir up a world of sinfulness” (Johnson, 346).

“Fire that is controlled is good. With controlled fire, for example, we heat our houses and cook our meals. There is a beauty and a warmth about a fire in its proper place. But a fire out of control is the worst imaginable thing. It destroys everything good and lovely in our lives” (Draper, 102).

Even so, as Easton (47) points out, it is “a universe in which every sort of unrighteousness exists; every man must remember the infinite possibilities of evil of which his tongue is capable!”

2. Its poison is pervasive: “The tongue is set among our members, [as] the one poisoning the entire body” (3:6b)

The word “poisoning” (*spilousa*) means “staining, staining, polluting, defiling.” Its only other occurrence in the NT is Jude 23.

“The point is that the tongue is often guilty of realizing its potential for evil, and in so doing infects the rest of the body” (Nystrom, 178). In other words, “the tongue defiles the body by lending itself to be the organ of so many sins” (Ropes, 235).

3. Its corruption is comprehensive: “The tongue sets the whole course of one’s life on fire” (3:6c)

It corrupts relationships from birth to death. “It can corrupt all of life, whether that of an individual or that of a community” (Nystrom, 179).

4. Its fire is kindled by the devil: “Tongue is set on fire by hell” (3:6d)

The word “hell” (*geennes*) occurs here for the twelfth and final time in the NT, the other eleven appearances coming from Jesus Himself (Mt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk. 9:43, 45, 47; Lk. 12:5).

The tongue “is often inspired by hell itself. A bad tongue is the organ of the devil” (Johnson, 346).

Nystrom (179) suggests that the word “hell” “could function as a circumlocution [“a roundabout or indirect way of speaking”] for Satan, just as ‘heaven’ is frequently a circumlocution for God (see Luke 15:21).” If that is the case here, then Satan is regarded as the source of false teachings which were then threatening, negatively impacting and infecting the church.

5. It is so unlike animal life: “For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and sea creatures is being tamed and has been tamed by man” (3:7)

Man is able to tame and train all sorts of wild creatures. The mention of these four in particular is not meant to be limited or restricted to them; they simply represent the animal kingdom at large which have been subjected to and controlled by man.

6. It cannot be tamed by man: “But no one is being able to tame the tongue: a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (3:8)

Despite such remarkable skills among wild creatures, man is not remarkably skillful in taming and training his own tongue. It is as venomous as a poisonous snake.

The word “deadly” (*thanatephorou*) occurs here only in the NT. It means “death bringing,” and is always on the outlook for more (“restless”). It is “like the restless death-bringing tongue of the asp before it strikes” (Robertson, 44).

The word “restless” (*akatastaton*) occurs here only in the NT. It depicts the tongue as “unstable, of vacillating” (BAG, 29); “unruly” (Johnson, 346); “that cannot be restrained” (Thayer, 22); the ever-searching, never-satisfied, continually-obsessed with any and all forms of evil or wickedness.

C. The Tongue Must Be Policed (3:9-12)

Since man is incapable of taming and training the tongue, it still must be policed by God because of its inconsistent and contradictory potential.

1. It has inconsistent potential: “With it we bless the Lord and Father and with it we curse the men who are made in the image of God” (3:9)

In this verse, James “explains more precisely what the sin and uncontrollability of the tongue is. . . . the depth of the wickedness of the tongue is to be found in its inconsistency” (Songer, 123).

The word “bless” (*eulougoumen*) means to say ‘good words’ to and about God. It means “to praise, to celebrate Him” (Knowling, 79). Hort (76) calls this “the highest function of speech.”

The word “curse” (*katarometha*) should not be restricted to simply the use of profanity; “it refers to the Judaistic custom in the first century of expressing the hope that evil and tragedy would come to a person . . . an enduring hatred which eagerly longed for a person’s misfortune” (Songer, 124).

The reprehensible nature of this inconsistency is further anchored in the fact that this *cursing* implicates God Himself. As Oesterley (454) notes: “The lesson is that he who curses him who was made in the image of God implicitly curses the prototype [God] as well.”

2. It has contradictory potential: “Out of the same mouth comes forth blessing and cursing. It must not, my fellow Christians, be things in this manner” (3:10)

James here “does not imply a combination of blessing and cursing, [as being] condemned, while either by itself were allowable” (Mayor, 123). He “simply means that the mouth which blesses God when uttering prayer, curses men at some other times, e.g. during embittered controversy” (Ross, 64). Brown (73) notes: “No louder or deeper curses have been uttered probably than have come from the lips of ecclesiastics.” It is contradiction at its extreme, and so is here prohibited: *ou chre* (“ought not so to be” [KJV] – “ought not to be this way” [NAS] – “ought not to be like this” [Williams] – “we mustn’t do that” [Beck] – “this is not right” [Goodspeed] – “never ought to happen” [Phillips]).

3. Illustrations of inconsistency: “The fountain does not pour out from the same opening sweet and bitter does it?” (3:11). “Can, my fellow Christians, a fig-tree produce olives or a vine produce figs? No. Neither can salt water produce fresh water” (3:12).

These three common illustrations point out in a very simple way “the absurdity” (Gibson, 44) of noted inconsistency and contradiction. No more elementary illustrations could be offered to address the case at hand. No more significant illustrations could be considered in puncturing any ideology which runs counter to these common sense realities.

The word “bitter” (*pikron*) refers to “spring water which is bitter or brackish to the taste” (Michaelis, 124; cp. v. 14, and nowhere else in the NT).

IX TRUE WISDOM (3:13-18)

“Who is wise and understanding among you? He must demonstrate out of his good behavior his works in [the] gentleness of wisdom” (3:13)

Presumably in reference to teachers, they must be “wise” (*sophos*) and “understanding” (*epistemon*).

A. False Wisdom (3:14-16)

“And if you have bitter jealousy and strife in your heart, you must not be arrogant and you must not lie against the truth” (3:14)

“This wisdom is not coming down from above but of the earth, sensual, demonic” (3:15)

“For where [there is] jealousy and strife, there [is] disorder and all kinds of evil practices” (3:16)

1. Characteristics:

- a. “Bitter jealousy – strife – arrogance – lie” (v. 14)

(1) “bitter jealousy” (*zelon pikron*) – Here the word means “a pessimistic or complaining note” (Michaelis, 124).

(2) “strife in your heart” (*eritheian en te kardia*) – This refers to those who “think only of immediate gain . . . ‘base self-seeking,’ or simply as ‘baseness’, the nature of those who cannot lift their gaze to higher things” (Buchscl, 661).

(3) “must not be arrogant” (*me katakauchasthe*) – This word

“helps bring out strongly the element of comparative superiority expressed in boasting, ‘to boast in triumphant comparison with others . . . pride in one’s own wisdom” (Bultmann, 653).

(4) “must not lie against the truth” (*pseudestha kata tes aletheias*) – Boasting in their own goodness would be to lie against the truth.

b. “of the earth – sensual – demonic” (v. 15)

(1) “of the earth” (*epigeios*) – This means “‘existing on earth,’ ‘belonging to it,’ ‘earthly,’ in contrast to what is not on earth or heavenly” (Sasse, 680).

(2) “sensual” (*psuchike*) – This word “describes that which is earthly and which is thus closed to the world of God. . . . this restriction is demonic. The earth or lower sphere is governed by wicked demons and hence gives rise to strife, unrest, and conflict” (Schweizer, 663).

(3) “demonic” (*daimoniodes*) – This is the only occurrence of this word in the NT. Nevertheless, the fact that demons “are mentioned only with relative infrequency in the NT does not mean that their existence and operation are contested or doubted. . . . they stand behind paganism and other demonic powers” (Foerster, 17).

2. Consequences:

a. “disorder” (*akatastasia*) (v. 16a) – The word means “‘unrest,’ ‘political turmoil,’ ‘revolution,’ disruption of the peace of the community by disputes” (Oepke, 446); “confusion” (Bengel, 714). Ropes (248) notes “the word seems to have something of the bad associations of our word ‘anarchy.’” Hatch (4) notes that “the political circumstances of Greece and the East after the death of Alexander had developed the idea of political instability.”

b. “all kinds of evil practices” (*pan phaulon pragma*) (v. 16b) - The word “evil” (*phaulon*) means “worthless, bad, base, wicked in a moral sense” (BAG, 862). Vine (391) adds: “paltry or contemptible, belonging to a low order of things.” Trench (317) says it carries the idea of “good-for-nothingness, the impossibility of any true gain ever coming forth from it; the primary meaning of worthlessness, light, unstable, blown about by every wind.” The word “practices” (*pragma*) denotes “*that which has been done, a deed, an accomplished fact or what is being*

accomplished” (Thayer, 534); “trouble, difficulty; an unfitting act” (Moulton and Milligan, 532); possibly “*law-suit, dispute*” (BAG, 704).

B. True Wisdom (3:17-18)

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good deeds, without favoritism, without hypocrisy” (3:17)

“And the fruit of righteousness is being sown in peace by those who are practicing peace” (3:18)

1. Characteristics:

- a. “pure – peaceable - gentle – open to reason – full of mercy and good deeds” (3:17)

(1) “pure” (*hagne*) – “Pure from earthly, animal, and devilish defilements” (Bengel, 714). The other three qualities are “secondary as outgrowths of this primary quality” (Ibid.)

(2) “peaceable” (*eirenike*) – This denotes “loving peace” (Robertson, 47). The only other occurrence of this word in the NT is Heb. 12:11.

(3) “gentle” (*epieikes*) – The word denotes “outward acts of kindness, forbearance, graciousness”; “a signal evidence of the high development of ethics, moderation, rectifies and redresses the injustices of justice” (Trench, 154).

(4) “open to reason” (*eupeithes*) – The word means “ready to obey, obedient, willing to yield, the opposite of obstinate” (Ropes, 249). This is the only occurrence of this word in the NT.

(5) “full of mercy and good deeds” (*meste eleous kai karpon agathon*) – Mercy is “a compassion which leads to practical help, not the mere emotion of pity” (Ibid, 250). This denotes “showing active sympathy towards the suffering and the sorrowing” (Tasker, 82) – such as the poor man whom they tossed to the wind and treated with abject partiality. They were not practicing love for God as seen in their lack of love for the poor man. They “displayed [none of] the manifold activities of a consecrated life” (Winkler, 52) to God and corollary response to man, made in the image of God. True wisdom was drastically needed among them.

- b. “without favoritism, without hypocrisy” (3:17)

- (1) “without favoritism” (*adiakritos*) – The word means “undivided, unwavering, whole-hearted with reference to the evil situation described in vv. 9-10” (Ropes, 250). It denotes “impartial, without wavering, unshakeable” (Buchsle, 950). They failed in this regard with the poor man. This is the only occurrence of this word in the NT.
- (2) “without hypocrisy” (*anupokritos*) – The word means “sincere, unfeigned” (Robertson, 47). It denotes “genuineness [which opposes] the demonic and immoral ‘wisdom’ of the false teachers” (Wilckens, 571). This word occurs elsewhere in the NT: Rom. 12:9; 2 Cor. 6:6; 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 1:5; 1 Pt. 1:22.

2.. Consequences:

- a. “the fruit of righteousness is being sown in peace” (*karpos dikarosunes en eirene speiretai*) (3:18a)

“The fruit of righteousness” refers to “the reward which righteous conduct brings, the product of righteousness” (Ropes, 250). It is “the reward or result of doing what God demands – to follow divine wisdom is to be led to righteousness” (Songer, 125).

The expression “being sown in peace” indicates “peace only; i.e., a righteousness capable of gaining its due reward must be peaceable” (Ropes, 250). That is, “the righteousness is sown or carefully bestowed in and on the community to contribute to its peace or redemption” (Songer, 126).

- b. “by those who are practicing peace” (*tois poiousin eirene*) (3:18b)

This “practicing peace” indicates “not merely to conciliate opponents, but to act peaceably” (Ropes, 251).

After all, those who are practicing peace are the children of God who are called “peacemakers” (Mt. 5:9). They are kin to the God Who is “the author of peace and lover of concord” (Tasker, 83). They are imitators of God.

So, this verse “promises a concluding blessing to those who serve God and His cause without selfishness and strife” (Harper, 228).

This is true wisdom in motion! What a spectacular failure they were in this regard.

X TRAGIC BEHAVIORS (4:1-12)

A. Selfishness Divides People (4:1-2)

1. Fruit: “Why the fightings and quarrels among you?” (4:1a)

The Christian faith is not one of mere passive endurance in the face of the many evils which dot the hallways of life on planet earth. In fact, “an open summons to war in the service of the Messiah was one of these demands” (Bauernfeind, 513). However, there are some things which run counter to the norms and patterns which befit that faith. Two are mentioned here: The word “fightings” (*polemoi*) indicates the general atmosphere of warfare: “a picture of a Christian community deeply divided, composed of a variety of groups, some them marked by different combinations of unwholesome practices” (Nystrom, 223). The word “quarrels” (*machai*) refers to or “presents the separate conflicts or battles in the war” (Robertson, 49). These quarrels between individuals created separate factions within the Christian community. Both were the fruit of the root that is pinpointed in the following way:

2. Root: “Is it not from your lusts which are waging war among your members? (4:1b)

The word “lusts” (*hedonon*) is transliterated into English as *hedonism* – “the teaching that pleasure or happiness is the highest good, or the proper end of action.”

This is “the place where strife originates . . . [lusts] disrupt not merely the relationship with God and man’s peace, but also relationships with other men” (Stahlin, 923).

The word “waging war” (*strateuomenon*) “implies that these pleasures are permanently on active service, and the expression *in your members* means that there is no part of the human frame which does not afford them a battleground” (Tasker, 85).

“You lust and do not possess, you murder and you desire and are not able to obtain, you quarrel and fight, you do not possess because you do not ask” (4:2)

As Wesley (866) observes, “And no marvel; for a man full of evil desire, of envy or hatred cannot pray.”

B. Selfishness Distorts Prayer (4:3)

1. Harmful in our horizontal relations with others: “You ask and

do not receive because you ask with wrong motive, in order that you may spend on your pleasures” (4:3)

Even when going through the verbal motions of prayer, the prayers are useless because of their self-centeredness (“that you may spend on your pleasures”). Indeed, the “wrong motive” is to “spend on your pleasures.” The word “spend” (*dapanesete*) is translated “consume” (KJV) and refers to “the sphere of activity in which our carnal pleasures can find gratification” (Ross, 76). It is the same word in Lk. 15:14 in relation to the prodigal son’s waste.

2. Harmful in our vertical relations with God.

“Self-centered prayers that ignore the will of God bring us no enduring satisfaction. . . . It is impossible to maintain a selfish spirit in the presence of God” (Harper, 230).

C. Selfishness Disobeys God (4:4-6)

1. Spiritual adultery is blind & deaf to the value of spiritual concerns & the will of God: “You adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship with the world is hostility with God? Therefore, whoever may be planning to be a friend of the world is being an enemy of God” (4:4)

The word “adulteresses” (*moichalides*) portrays them as “disloyal and unfaithful” (Harper, 230); cp. Robertson, 50) or “spiritual infidelity” (Vaughan, 85); “adulterous spouses of Christ who commit fornication with the word” (Johnson, 348).

2. God is a jealous lover & does not tolerate rivals.

The word “friendship” (*philia*) speaks of one who “adopts a worldly policy, and cultivates worldly fervor and associations” (Winkler, 55). The way of *the world* is *pleasure*, ver. 3” (Bengel, 716), and as far as God is concerned, He does not and will not stand for this adoption. “No alien friendship can be tolerated for a moment by Him” (Ross, 78).

The words “hostility” (*echthra*) and “enemy” (*echthros*) denote that “the world, with its seductive objects, its ungodly multitudes, and the principles by which its course is directed, is an empire revolted from God and under the control of his adversary” (Winkler, 55).

Indeed, “to conduct one’s life in accordance with this point of view

is to be **an enemy of God**" (Poteat, 56).

"Or do you think the scripture is speaking to no purpose, He yearns over the Spirit Who lives in us" (4:5)

The RSV translates, "He yearns jealously over the spirit which he has made to dwell in us." "The Spirit whom He caused to live in us yearns for us even with jealousy" (Beck). "He yearns jealously for the spirit he set within us" (Moffatt). "The Spirit which God has put in our hearts has a strong desire for us" (The NT in Basic English).

Although this is not a direct OT quote, it "seems to be a poetical rendering of the idea of Ex. 20:5" (Ropes, 262).

These words "witness to the truth that the third Person of the Holy Trinity abides in our hearts striving to acquire the same love for Him on our part which He bears for us" (Oesterley, 459).

In other words, God has a "rightful ownership through creation" for this "longing affection" as the Divine Lover for His people (Ropes, 262).

"[as] He gives greater grace? Therefore, it says, '**God is opposed to proud ones and gives grace to humble ones**'" (4:6)

God "gives greater grace" or "the more and greater, for [because of] this longing and jealous desire" (Alford, 315), or, as Huther (184) puts it, "because it is so." When this verse is correlated with the previous one, Brown (93) captures a significant tone which must not be missed: ". . . the most moving picture of God yearning with unspeakable desire for the *entire* devotion of the fickle heart – not giving it up – but, in spite of unfaithfulness, waiting and giving . . . whose grace abounds even where sin abounds."

This OT quotation is from Proverbs 3:34.

As Knowling (101) observes, "the best meaning appears to be that the Spirit of God bestows upon those who submit to the Divine will, and surrender themselves to it entirely, richer supplies of grace to effect that complete surrender to the yearnings of the Divine love, and to count all things as loss in response to it."

The word "opposed" (*antitassetai*) means that God leaves "persistent evildoers to pursue their self-determined course, with eventual retribution" (Vine, 968). That is, God sets Himself against and opposes them (Ibid, 825).

The "proud ones" (*huperephanois*) are "those who love themselves and therefore 'the world,' [and] will receive no such help, but rather are treated by God as his enemies" (Easton, 57).

The "humble ones" (*tapeinois*) are those who "are ready to admit our wrong spirit and our need of help" (Harper, 232).

D. Selfishness Demands Penitence (4:7-10)

As McNab (1125) observes, “there now follows a series of practical injunctions which have special application to those who are seeking the way of God more perfectly. . . . The clean hands symbolize our activities; the pure heart represents the very citadel of our personality.”

There are ten imperatives in vs. 7-10 to depict needed changes from the selfishness which stands in contrast to the will of God.

These ten calls to make changes or repent are essential for the Christian life, in the short-run and long term:

a. “Therefore, you must be submissive to God” (4:7)

The word “therefore” (*oun*) means the following commands are “built on the foundation laid in verse 6” (Nystrom, 228). The word “be submissive” (*hupotagete*) is an aorist verb which means “take your position under God to do his will and to obey his Word alone; do this effectively, definitely, once for all” (Lenski, 631). Even though the word for “repentance” (*metanoia*, *metanoeo*) is not used here, the idea of submissiveness to God denotes a change of direction from pride, arrogance, and selfishness to humility and contriteness of heart or spirit.

b. “You must give resistance to the devil and he will flee from you” (4:7)

The word “give resistance” (*antistete*) means “to withstand, oppose, to stand firm against” (Vine, 968); “to stand your ground” (BAG, 66).

The word “devil” (*diabolo* – “slanderer”) is synonymous with Satan who “is the ultimate source of evil” (Nystrom, 228-229). He is called “the tempter” (Mt. 4:5); “the wicked one” (Mt. 13:19, 38); “a murderer” and “a liar and the father of it” (Jn. 8:44); “the god of this world” (1 Cor. 4:4); “your adversary” (1 Pt. 5:8). The Devil/Satan has never submitted himself to God and encourages others to follow in his steps.

[Cp. the word “hell” in 3:6 and “demonic” in 3:15].

This “resistance” by Jesus is also reflected in Lk. 4:13 but is only for a time – not done once and for all. Eph. 6 also presents the armour which is necessary for this resistance. 1 Pt. 5:9 also addresses the need to engage in this resistance. The phrase, “and he will flee from you” provides assurance that “our very resistance will constitute our victory” (Tasker, 93). However, again, this “resistance-flee” syndrome must

be viewed as an ongoing contest with evil and is not something which once-done will be done-forever without subsequent or additional episodes of “resistance.”

In the words of Manton (365), “Every denial is a great discouragement to Satan. . . . He is like a dog that standeth looking and waving his tail to receive something from those that sit at table; but if nothing be thrown out, he goeth his way.”

- c. “You must draw near to God and He shall draw near to you” (4:8)

The verb “draw near” (*eggisate*) means “to approach, come near to hear and obey.” Knox translates, “come close.”

Ross (80) explains: “draw nigh unto God, as those who long to come into the closest possible relation to Him, in contrast to those who are His enemies and who keep at a distance from Him. God will then draw nigh unto you, to visit you with His salvation.”

- d. “You must cleanse your hands, sinners” (4:8)

The word “cleanse” (*katharisate*) means “the removal of the moral defilement which attaches to our outward conduct” (Vaughan, 91; cp. Easton, 58).

According to Ex. 30:19-21, the Jewish priests had to wash or cleanse both their hands and feet before entering the tabernacle of the congregation, the failure to do so would lead to their deaths.

The same ideology is found in Isa. 1:15-16 about hands being full of blood and other evil practices. In the same vein, “the hands that had been stained in the fightings and murders referred to [earlier] by James needed cleansing” (Ross, 80).

The term “sinners” (*hamartoloi*) will occur again in 5:20. James uses it to explode the hardness of hearts and to awaken and motive them to repent, a prerequisite to or element involved in submissiveness to God (4:7).

- e. “You must purify your hearts, undecided ones” (4:8)

The word “purify” (*hagnisate*) means to be “morally free from stain, shame etc.” (Hauck, 414). Indeed, “the purity of the NT community is personal and moral by nature. It

refers to “inward purity” (Vaughan, 91; cp. Easton, 58). It consists in full and unreserved self-offering to God which renews the heart and rules out any acceptance of what is against God” (Hauck, 425).

The word “undecided ones” (*dipsuchoi*) was first used in this letter in 1:8 where it is translated “double-minded” (KJV), and refers to those who were in doubts about God. These are the only two occurrences of this word in the NT.

Here, however, it “refers to those who try to live in two natures, one of the world and one of God. This sort of double allegiance is not possible” (Nystrom, 239).

f. “You must be sorrowful” (4:9)

The word “sorrowful” (*talaiporesate*) means “to lament, to be afflicted.” This is the only occurrence of this word in the NT.

It expresses “the inward feeling of deep misery that is the result of a deep sense of sin” (Ross, 81). This imperative is “a vehemently expressed recommendation of sober earnestness as the proper mood of a Christian, in contrast to a light and frivolous spirit” (Ropes, 270).

g. “You must be mournful” (4:9)

The word “mournful” (*penthesate*) “expresses a self-contained grief, never violent in its manifestations . . . no ground of an outward garb of mourning” (Ropes, 271), even though Trench (238) notes that in Mt. 5:4, there are “those who so grieve that their grief manifests itself externally.”

h. “You must be weeping” (4:9)

The word “weeping” (*klausate*) means “to cry, to bewail, e.g. to express grief at parting, or strong inner emotion, esp. shame or remorse” (Rengstorff, 722).

This encompasses “the outward manifestation of the feeling of wretchedness and sorrow” (Vaughan, 92).

i. “Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into gloom” (4:9)

The word “laughter” (*gelos*) refers to frivolous, lighthearted or superficial attitudes, and is “in contrast to demonstrative weeping” (Vine, 652). This is the only occurrence of this word in the NT.

The word “mourning” (*penthos*) occurs only four other times in the NT: Rev. 18:7 (twice), 8; 21:4. It depicts “grief that is manifested” (Vincent, 757).

The word “gloom” (*katepheian*) “refers primarily to the outward expression of a heavy heart” (Ropes, 272) and is found nowhere else in the NT.

As Oesterley (461) notes: altogether in this verse, “the words express the contrast between the loud unseemly gaiety of the pleasure-seeker, and the subdued mien [“a person’s look or manner”] and downcast look of the penitent.”

- j. “You must be humble before [the] Lord and He shall lift you up” (4:10)

Ross (81) sums it up most poignantly:

In view of the fact that it is the humble who receive grace, we have now an appeal for humility, and the appeal is driven home by the thought that we are all ‘in the sight of the Lord.’ Since He is so great in power and we are so weak and frail, since He is so holy and we are so sinful, we ought to humble ourselves before Him. The man who does dare to lift up his eyes to heaven is raised to heights of glory to which the proud can never come.”

As Poteat (58) notes: “it may be paradoxical, but it nevertheless is true that the only real exaltation and emancipation of the human spirit come through humbling oneself to God.”

These ten imperatives “must be in a real sense permanent characteristics of the Christian” (Tasker, 96).

E. Slander Destroys People (4:11-12)

The word *slander* means “a spoken statement meant to do harm to the name and reputation of another.”

- 1. Slander is Prohibited: “You must stop slandering one another, fellow Christians” (4:11a)

The ten previous aorist tense imperatives were in a positive framework, while this imperative of prohibition is in the present tense and calls for what was already in motion to cease. As noted by Dana and Mantey (301), “a prohibition in the present imperative demands that action then in progress be stopped,

and is here so translated.

This prohibition is not against mild offensive remarks but “rather of harsh censorious judging” (Gibson, 56). Tyndale translates it “backbite.” This slander or “speaking about others behind their backs in a derogatory fashion” (Tasker, 98) is made even worse since it was taking place in relation to “fellow Christians” or fellow-members of the body of Christ. “Back-biting others is, in fact, a subtle form of self-exaltation” (Tasker, 99). And as Calvin (84) observes, “hypocrisy is always proud; and by nature we are hypocrites who eagerly exalt ourselves and degrade others.”

2. Slander is Perversion: “For the one who slanders a brother or judges his brother is speaking against law and judging law. And if law is judged, you are not a practitioner of law but a judge” (4:11b)

Reference to “law” is the law of Christian love as seen in the life of Christ. So, to slander a fellow Christian is to condemn him, and to condemn or pass sentence is the function of a judge. To be or become a “judge” is to raise a barrier to the Christian faith, “for he who judges, judges not only the man before him, but he law [of love] also” (Alford, 317).

After all, it would appear that the one who slanders his fellow Christian is either consciously or unconsciously saying that the law of love does not apply to him (Easton, 58-59).

3. Slander is Presumptuous: “There is one lawgiver and judge, the one who is able to save and to destroy; and who are you if you are judging your neighbor?” (4:12)

“God’s almighty power, to which we are wholly subject, gives him the right to judge” (Ropes, 275).

As McNab (1126) notes, “the Giver of the law is the only true and ultimate Judge, who alone has the power *to save and to destroy*. Who is man to dare to usurp the office and prerogative of the supreme Judge by judging his neighbor?”

XI TARGETING TOMORROW (4:13-17)

In this section of scripture, James addresses a form of being an enemy of God by planning for the future without consideration of Him.

- A. Avoid Arrogant Confidence : “Come now you who are saying, ‘To-day or tomorrow we shall go into this city and we shall remain there a year and shall engage in business and shall make a profit’ (4:13)

Those to whom these words are directed “are worldlings, whether unconverted members of the Christian community, or aliens who persecuted the brotherhood and blasphemed the name of Christ . . . those who are the votaries[“a person who is devoted to a particular pursuit, occupation, study, or interest; devotees”] of the world, and who will continue in its service notwithstanding his admonition” (Winkler, 60).

“To *buy and sell, and get gain* are legitimate pursuits, but they become corrupt and immoral if conducted without any reference to God and His will and the brevity of life” (McNab, 1126).

- B. Acknowledge Absolute Certainty: “Yet you do not know what about tomorrow. For what is your life? It is a vapor appearing for a little while and vanishing away” (4:14)

Life is so uncertain and for anyone to plan tomorrow or any other future, without considering the God Who created life, is illegitimate and absurd, let alone irrational, illogical, senseless, and presumptuous.

The word “vapor” (*atmis*) “is used of smoke, Acts. 2:19; figuratively of human life” (Vine, 1206) here – the only two occurrences of this word in the NT. It “stresses life’s frailty and brevity . . . so fleeting and transient that it is here for a moment and then it is gone” (Vaughan, 96).

- C. Apply Accurate Counsel: “Instead you to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall practice this or that’” (4:15)

Instead of engaging in such presumptuous, arrogant planning, James offers some accurate counsel: plan and “rest humbly on the will of God” (Ross, 84).

“But now you are boasting in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil” (4:16)

The word “boasting” (*kauchasthe – kauchesis*) “deepens their severity” because it indicates ‘evil’” (Ross, 84) and the source of such evil is Satan.

The word “arrogance” (*alazoneiais*) “indicates insolent and empty assurance; and here the assurance lies in presumptuous trust in the stability of oneself and one’s surroundings” (Plummer, 270).

“Therefore, knowing the right to do and not practicing [it], to him it is sin” (4:17)

Robertson (56) says that “unused knowledge of one’s duty is sin,

the sin of omission.” Johnson (349) phrases it as follows: “I have warned you that such boasting is wrong, and that the right way is to speak submissively (as in verse 15). If you know how to do the right and yet do it not the sin is the greater on account of your knowledge.”

In a fittingly foundational frame of reference, “sin consists not only in doing evil, but in failing to do the good we know. . . . sin is any want of conformity to the will of God. When He makes known His will, it is our responsibility to act accordingly” (McNab, 1126).

XII TROUBLE WITH SELFISHNESS (5:1-6)

- A. Deceptive Laboring for Things Which Do Not Last: “Come now you rich ones, weep aloud and howl over the miseries which are coming upon you” (5:1)

The words “come now” (*age nun*) represent “a call to attention, indicating that something important and urgent” (Winkle, 62) is forthcoming. It is a “warning of certain judgment” (Robertson, 57). This threatening judgment is not a call for consideration on their part but a command to awaken to what lies ahead.

It is directed to “the rich ones” (*ho plousioi*) who are Christians (1:10f) and/or non-Christians (2:1f). It is addressed specifically to them because of their idolatrous fascination of wealth and luxurious living to the neglect of the poor. Their aim or purpose in life is selfishness and is lodged in their possessions and how such possessions contribute to their relentless pursuit of pleasures.

The pronouncement of this judgment has a ring which resembles those denunciations of prophets in the OT, and that without apology. In this verse, two specific imperatives are declared:

The word “weep aloud” (*klausate*) is an aorist tense imperative which signals a “burst into weeping” (Robertson, 57).

The word “howl” (*ololuzontes*) is a present tense imperative which signals a continuation of such agony because they will continue in their selfish ambitions and that without remedy.

Instead of rejoicing in their possessions, this “proclamation of judgment” (Winkler, 62) is nothing short of “an assured damnation” (Ropes, 283). Instead of rejoicing in their selfish obsession with wealth and its corollaries, they will only experience “miseries” (*talaiporiais*) – “the sufferings of the damned” (Ropes, 284). Such miseries are already “coming upon” (*eperchomenais*) upon them. That is, they are never satisfied with what they have. Rather, the more they have, the more they want. It is an empty pit of never-ending dissatisfaction. Wealth and possessions are never an end in themselves, and were never designed to bring fulfillment. Instead, they were designed to help the poor, the neglected, and downtrod-

den. So, the deception of riches and their selfish pursuits is that they only lead to “disastrous consequences” (Winkler, 62). They actually wind up functioning in reverse. The cares and anxieties associated with the accumulation of riches create fears and frustrations over ‘what will I do without them,’ etc. They become idolatrous!

“Your riches are in a state of rotten decay and your clothes are in a state or condition of moth-eaten” (5:2)

This verse hammers home the unsettling nature of riches. The perfect tense verb “are in a state of rotten decay” (*sesepe*) denotes the existing state or condition, in the eyes of God, of the ultimate worthlessness of wealth. The selfishly consumed nature of riches is that they are under the curse of God and actually represent poverty. Riches are really ruin when they are stored up for oneself.

“Your clothes” (*ta himatia humon*), which are worn in order to manifest your wealth to others, are also “in a state or condition” (*gegonen* – another perfect tense stressing “the imminent and ineluctable end of earthly wealth” [Bauernfeind, 277]).

This state or condition is associated with being “moth-eaten” (*setobrota*) – the moth destroys clothes and “is a symbol of the threat to man himself” (Ibid, 276). This is the only occurrence of the word in the NT.

That is, clothing too are deceptive both to oneself and others. In fact, this wearing of wealthy clothing may not only be a sign of covetousness within oneself but also in the eyes of others who may adopt whatever steps may be necessary to secure such possessions for themselves (stealing, murder, financial indebtedness, etc.).

“Your gold and your silver are in a state of being rusted and their rust shall be a witness against you and shall consume you like fire. having laid up in the last days” (5:3)

In fact, “your gold and silver” – objects of their devotional worship and idolatry – are actually “in a state or condition of being rusted” (*katiotai* – another perfect tense stressing a present and permanent reality). That is, “these riches have always been rotting, turning moth-eaten, rusting, they were never in any other condition. They appeared fine and grand but were the opposite for those who put their heart’s desire on them” (Lenski, 646).

“Just as gold and silver cannot be protected against rust by their quality as precious metals” (Ibid, 278), so neither can the wealthy trust in their temporary, transient riches to be anything but a noose around their necks.

The word, “they shall consume you” (*phagetai*) is a future tense verb of the word ordinarily translated “eat” to portray the devastating re-

sult of pursuing wealth for selfish ends. These very riches will actually testify against them in judgment. So, what they have been depending upon will produce deceiving results and their “testimony cannot be contradicted” (Lenski, 647).

The word “you” (*tas sarkas humon* = “your flesh”) is in the plural and thus indicates either the various parts of your fleshly body, or may mean “all of you” who so recklessly pursue wealth for selfish ends. Either way, the plural “emphasizes the completeness of the work of destruction” (Robertson, *Studies*, 170).

Ropes (186) adds: “The idea is of rust corroding, and so consuming, human flesh, like the wearing into the flesh of a rusty iron chain – a terrible image for the disastrous results of treating money as the reliance and the chief aim of life.”

The comparison, “like fire” reenforces the fierceness and irresistibility of such destruction.

The phrase, “having laid up in the last days,” may refer to the end of time on earth, their last days on earth, or, more likely, the last days refer to the days since the coming of Christ (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; 1 Pt.1:20) and the time on earth until He returns the second time.

With this punch, James stresses an ever-present truth: “when they should have been preparing for impending judgment, the rich were devoting themselves to the accumulation of more wealth” (Vaughan, 102).

- B. Defrauding Laborers of Appropriate Wages: “Behold the pay for the laborers who mowed your fields whom you defrauded is crying out against you, and the outcry of those who did the harvesting entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth” (5:4)

James now grinds his teeth more tightly as he reveals the way in which their wealth has been accumulated. It did not come through legitimate business transactions and investments but through defrauding the laboring of poor people.

The word “laborers” (*ergaton*) refers to workers who “mowed” (*amesanton* – here only in the NT) “the fields (of crops)” (*tas choras* – “not a fenced subdivision but the whole estate under one ownership” [Ropes, 288]), thus, indicating a vast amount of territory which required hard, laborous efforts and time.

But instead of paying them what they deserved, the rich ones defrauded or robbed them of appropriate pay so that they, the rich, could enjoy a more luxurious lifestyle.

But the One Who is recording all of life’s endeavors hears “the cries” of the defrauded ones and those cries have “entered” (*eiseleluthasin* – another perfect tense verb denoting the permanent state or condition of) crises having entered “the ears” of the

Ultimate Boss and Supervisor of life's endeavors, cries which not only entered His "ears" at one point but which also remain there permanently. That is, the evidence is always before the Supervisor and He will render accurate appraisal of the entire situation.

The phrase "the Lord of Sabaoth" occurs only one other time in the NT: Rom. 9:29. It depicts or describes "God according to his omnipotence and his majesty" (Lenski, 650); "the almighty power and majesty of Him who will make the cause of the labourers his own" (Ropes, 289);

- C. Deluded Laboring for Pleasure and Power: "You lived luxuriously upon the earth and practiced self-indulgence; you fattened your hearts in [preparation for] the day of slaughter" (5:5)

In verses 5-6, the concrete evidence of defrauding the laborers served one corrupt purpose which now unfolds in five features:

- (1) "you lived luxuriously upon the earth" – The word "luxuriously" (*ettruphesate*) means "pleasure" (KJV). It means "you have lived delicately, in soft luxury, not necessarily wanton vice" (Ropes, 289); "with specious delights *on the earth* – Now to be laid waste" (Bengel, 720). This is the only occurrence of this word in the NT.
- (2) "you practiced self-indulgence" – The word "self-indulgence" (*espatalesate*) "denotes *dainty* ["esteemed, worthy"] living" (Vincent, 760). It means "*voluptuously* ["giving pleasure to the senses; suggestive of sensual pleasure by fullness and beauty of form"], *in indulgence*" (BAG, 768); it suggests "positive lewdness and riotousness" (Ropes, 290).
- (3) "you fattened your heart hearts" – This is another description of "the extravagant and indulgent living of the rich" (Vaughan, 104); Weymouth translates, "you have gratified your appetite"; "indulged your fancies" (TCNT). "The day of slaughter" refers to the day of judgment which will overtake them assuredly. Moffatt (70) notes, "you must pay with your lives for the wanton indulgence that has cost your victims their lives, for the victims of your social and judicial oppression." Vaughan (104) suggests: "The words suggest that the manner of life pursued by the rich resembles that of cattle which feed contentedly on rich pastures, totally unconscious that they are being prepared for slaughter."

D. Deadly Living for the Righteous: “You condemned and murdered the righteous while never resisting you” (5:6)

(4) “you condemned the righteous” – This they did “by controlling the courts of justice” (Robertson, 60) through their injustice of craft maneuvering with their money.

Easton (65) says the word “righteous” is not referring to any one specific person but is “a generic term, *any* righteous person who has so suffered.”; “a general description of the saints of God” (Tasker, 116; cp. Lenski, 652; Robertson, 60; Knowling, 125, although he seems to wiggle a bit in connection with the next verse).

(5) “you murdered the righteous” – This could be referring to the death “of starvation caused by the withholding of wages” (Nyström, 272; Easton, 64).

Or, Johnson (350-351) suggests it could refer to “the murder of the Just One, Jesus. . . . It was the rich and influential, not the poor, who sought his death.” If Johnson is correct, then the words “while never resisting you” were fulfilled in His yielding to all the abuse, accusations, and maltreatment He received at their hands.

XIII TRAINING IN TROUBLES (5:7-11)

A. The Exhortation Behind Stedfastness: “Stand fast, therefore, fellow Christians, until the coming of the Lord. Behold the farmer keeps on waiting for the precious produce from the earth waiting steadfastly until he may receive the early and late rains” (5:7)

The word “stand fast” (*makrothumesate*), commonly translated “be patient,” is an aorist imperative which “denotes *summary* action - ‘an action that is either transient or instantaneous, . . . or to be undertaken at once” (Dana and Mantey, 300); Gibson (68) says it means “endurance.” Trench (196) observes: “a long holding out of the mind before it gives room to action or passion

The illustration of the farmer denotes this ‘endurance’ syndrome. Indeed, “he points to the farmer who tills his land, and sows his seed, and then, through all trials of climate, and they are many, waits patiently, expecting a harvest” (Brown, 117).

“You must be steadfast also, you must strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord stands near” (5:8)

Application wise, he uses the same word again for “steadfast, endurance, patience” while enduring tough times, suggesting “self-restraint that enables one to bear insult and injury without resorting to hasty

retaliation” (Vaughan, 107).

The word “strengthen” (*sterixate*) means “to stabilize, to enable to stand firm.” Harder (656) points out the word means “‘to fix,’ ‘to establish’ . . . The strengthening is by God, the Lord. It presupposes that the Christians who are to be strengthened are under assault and in danger of becoming uncertain or slothful in their faith or walk. . . . The effect or aim of strengthening is the impregnability of Christian faith in spite of the troubles which have to be endured.”

The reminder that “the coming of the Lord is near” provides the assurance needed to bolster their endurance amid the madness of life’s turbulent terrain.

- B. The Exclusions within Stedfastness: “You must stop complaining, fellow Christians, against one another, in order that you may not be judged; behold, the judge is standing before the door” (5:9)

This prohibition against “complaining” (*stenazete*) refers to resisting the urge to “groan . . . a suppressed feeling of ill-will” (Knowling, 130).

The phrase “that you may not be judged” conveys the idea of just how near the day of judgment is by the real judge. The words, the judge is standing before the door” denotes this “imminent nearness [which] should prevent the judgment of their complaints against their neighbors” (Ibid, 131). He knows all and will filter all things through His own knowledge and full-orb awareness of His right to judge.

- C. The Examples of Stedfastness: “Take an example, fellow Christians, of the suffering and of the steadfastness of the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord” (5:10)

Here, “he points to the prophets, as to men who have to stand alone, to walk a solitary path, to suffer evil. The noble men, the men who spoke in the name of the Lord, had often to live in a perfect storm of persecution; and their fidelity, there persistent endurance, should hearten every tried soul” (Brown, 117).

“Behold we bless those who endured; you have heard about the endurance of Job and you have seen the result of the Lord, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful” (5:11)

Those who exhibit such endurance are the ones who are blessed by God and, in a modified manner, His people

He also singles out Job to show that “God may permit men to be severely tried, and yet not suffer them to be beaten” (Brown, 118). Ross (95) reminds us of that which is too easily forgotten or even

discarded in the face of difficulties: “God has a *purpose* in the chastisement of His children. The chastisement may be severe, but we will see more and more clearly that suffering is not meaningless, that a purpose of grace is being wrought out in it, if we cling to Him and never lose our faith in Him, if patient endurance has its perfect working out in us (1:4).”

- XIV TAKING OF OATHS: “And above all, my fellow Christians, you must stop swearing either by heaven or by earth or any other oath; your yes must be yes and your no must be no, in order that you may not fall under judgment” (5:12)

The words “and above all” (*pro panton de*) denote that James is very much aware of the “cruciality” (Songer, 135) of what he is saying.

This present imperative means to cease what is already occurring: “stop swearing” (*omnuete*). In light of all the troubles through which his readers were passing, one of the most manifest irritations of it all was “the taking of the Lord’s name in vain by the use of explosive utterances and hasty and irreverent oaths” (Tasker, 124).

Since James uses the term “my fellow Christians,” Ropes concludes that they may be putting the “blame for [the] hardships on [the] brethren [as well as God, so] do not irreverently call upon God in your distress” (300). That is, to swear by “heaven” meant *God*, and to swear by “earth” meant *any issues in human existence*.

To simply speak in terms of clear and precise affirmations and/or denials is the way of truthfulness. Otherwise, “this wrong use of language will be judged with the utmost severity by Him who will call men to account for every *idle* word they speak, every word that yields no profit worth while (Mt. 12:36)” (Ross, 96).

- XV TIPS ON PRAYER (5:13-18)

- A. Pray Experientially: “Anyone among you suffering, he must keep on praying. Anyone happy, he must keep on singing praises (5:13)

The verb “suffering” (*kakopathei*) is translated “afflicted” (KJV) and “does not mean the *endurance* of affliction, but *affliction itself*” (Vincent, 762); “undergoing hardship.” The word occurs elsewhere in the NT: 2 Tim. 2:3, 9; 4:5. The noun form of this verb (*kakopatheis*) occurs only in 5:10 of this letter.

When this suffering or affliction is occurring, the most appropriate response is to “keep on praying” rather than “cursing as in v. 12.” That is, “let him cast his pain and his burden upon God. God is our refuge (Ps. 57:1). True prayer brings strength, comfort, help” (Lanski, 659).

The word “happy” (*euthumei*) may be translated “merry” (KJV),

“cheerful” (NAS), “happy mood” (Williams). It occurs in the NT only here and Acts 27:22, 25. When this cheerfulness is connected with adversity, it “will banish any danger of profanity” (Tasker, 128).

The word translated “singing praises” (*psalleto*) is a present tense imperative and calls for ongoing, continuous singing, as opposed to periodic, during “happy times.” The word also occurs in the NT: Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15 (twice); Eph. 5:19.

It may consist of singing psalms, but it “must be given a wider reference to every sounding of God’s praises, whether in company with others or alone, whether vocally with or without musical accompaniment, or silently” (Ibid.).

Bengel (722) adds: “It is allowable also to sing psalms in adversity, and to pray in prosperity: but in adversity the mind is usually less able to bear *the singing of psalms*; and that should rather be done which the mind endures.”

So, “let him keep on making melody” (Robertson, 64).

“Anyone among you sick, he must call for the elders of the church and they must keep on praying and anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (5:14)

When one is “sick,” the prescription still is prayer. But this time the prayer is in conjunction with the elders of the church – i.e., most likely the older and more respected *leaders* in the congregation.

Their prayer, however, is to take place in conjunction with anointing the sick person with oil in the name of the Lord – i.e., “the symbolic use of the oil to represent the healing power [of prayer] or presence of God . . . which makes this a religious rite, not a medical one” (Songer, 137; Ropes, 307). Manton (447) notes that “oil was a usual symbol of divine grace, an extraordinary sign of an extraordinary and miraculous cure.” Vaughan (118) suggests that the oil was “an aid to faith.” Cp. Lenski, 662.

“and the prayer of faith shall make well the one who is sick and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he may have sins they shall be forgiven him” (5:15)

“The prayer of faith is the prayer which faith offers . . . and likely involves not only the prayer of the elders but also the prayer of the one who is sick” (Winkler, 71).

James maintains that “the prayer of faith” – not the elders or the oil – will save the sick man from death because ***the Lord will raise him up*** (from his bed)” (Songer, 137), that is, “from the bed of sickness to health” (Ropes, 308).

If the sickness is somehow related to “sins,” “the Lord will not withhold his answer to the prayers that are made in true faith, will not

withhold recovery because of such sinning in the past. He will forgive and graciously heal” (Lenski, 665).

- B. Pray Earnestly: “Therefore, confess sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed” (5:16a)

The “sins” here mentioned are also the “sins” in vs. 15. Such “sins” may deeply distress one’s sense of being, especially when one is sick. In other words, the thought here is of the sins which the sick man may think was the cause of his sickness. If so, then he must confess his sins (admit or acknowledge them as such). If his mind is filled with anxiety and wounded over such thinking, then confession will be a therapeutic outcome: “may be healed.” This will provide not only “restoration to physical health but to the deeper sense of the healing [spiritually] of the soul” (Vaughan, 120-121). This confession is for all people to make to one another at any and all time in their lives. Indeed, “it is certainly true that to acknowledge when we have done wrong and to offer mutual prayers of intercession greatly strengthens the whole spiritual life of the church, and thus opens the way for increased blessings from God” (Harper, 247).

Robertson (65) notes: “Confession of sin to God is already assumed. But public confession of certain sins to one another in the meetings is greatly helpful in many ways.” It would be more helpful if Robertson had expanded his idea/s in this regard. Nevertheless, Easton (71) seems to suggest that this confessing of sins is restricted to sickness: “in every case of sickness there must be confession of sins (by the sick man) and prayer (by those visiting him but of course not excluding his own supplications).”

- C. Pray Effectively: “The effective prayer of a righteous person has powerful effects” (5:16b)

The “righteous person” is “one who is committed to doing God’s will and to cultivating a relationship with God that knows God’s heart” (Nystrom, 307). Bengel (723) suggests it is one “who is himself involved in no fall into sin.”

Mayor (236) notes that prayer is indeed effective or successful in bring about results: “there is much virtue in a just man’s prayers, when it is offered earnestly.” In other words, it works!

- D. Pray Expectantly: “Elijah was a man like us in every way, and he prayed earnestly not to rain, and it did not rain upon the earth for three years and six months” (5:17)

This OT example of Elijah (1 Kings 17-18) is encouraging. After

all, he possessed all the limitations which are common to all people. Nevertheless, he prayed expectantly and the results were astounding. These results were not the result of “magic wrought by a superhuman being” (Ropes, 312), but of expectant praying.

“And he prayed again and the heaven sent rain and the earth produced its fruit” (5:18)

So, “James concludes with the thought that just as the prayer of the righteous Elijah resulted in the refreshing of the earth, so the prayer of the righteous believer can result in the refreshing and healing of a Christian afflicted by sickness caused by sin” (Nystrom, 308).

XVI TURNING PEOPLE FROM WANDERING (5:19-20)

- A. Recognize the Possibility of Wandering: “My fellow Christians, if someone among you may wander from the truth” (5:19a)

The truth here is “the Christian truth, the saving truth of the gospel, almost equivalent to the faith” (Carr, 70). So, it is referring to “Christians who have become backsliders, who have *strayed* from the truth, the same people who have already been exhorted to confess their sins (vv. 15, 16)” (Ross, 102-103).

- B. Reclaim the Person Who Wanders: “and someone may turn him back” (5:19b)

This matter of “turn him back” (*epistrepsas*) means “conversion,” and the conversion spoken of here is from some perversion of the Christian truth” (Carr, 70): “from error to the way of truth” (Ropes, 314).

- C. Rejoice in the Pardon From Wandering: “you know that the one who turns a sinner from the deception of his way shall save his soul from death and shall cover up a multitude of sins” (5:20)

The words, “you know” refers to “both the one who converts, that he may be more diligent, and the one who is converted, that he may gratefully obey” (Bengel, 724).

The word “shall save” here denotes the “ultimate and final salvation” (Robertson, 67).

The word “shall cover up” means the sins of the converted man “by introducing him into that state of the Christian faith, wherein all sins, past, present, and future, are forgiven and done away” (Alford, 330). Indeed, “to obtain forgiveness or to make them to be forgotten” (Songer, 139).

As Nystrom (320) reminds us: “We also should not forget that James lays responsibility for the wanderer on the Christian community generally. In fact, this is just one example of the sort of mutual care and responsibility that he expects of all within the Christian community.”

Doremus Hayes (1567) writes about his appraisal of this entire Epistle: “All who are long on theory and short on practice ought to steep themselves in the spirit of James; and since there are such people in every community and in every age, the message of the Epistle will never grow old.”

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